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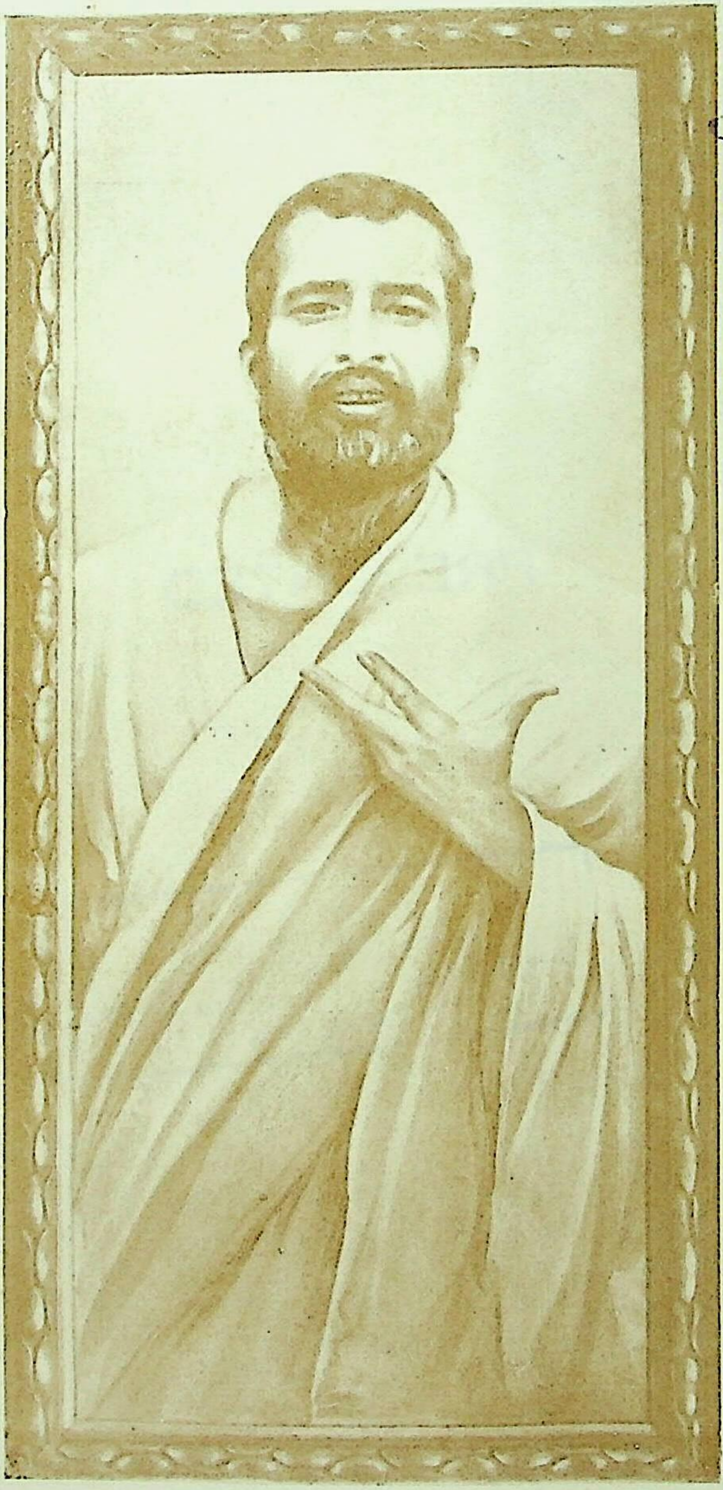

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A MODERN INCARNATION OF GOD

A Commentary On The Life And Teaching
Of Sri Ramakrishna

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PREFACE

Some years ago I submitted an essay to *Vedanta and the West,* the organ of the Ramakrishna Mission at Los Angeles in the U.S.A. In this paper* I wrote: "If one wants to get to the core of Hinduism as a religion, one must understand the theistic movement which has its roots in the Veda and Upaniṣads, and has had its periodic fruitions, chief among the latest being Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, and Rabindranath."

This apparently annoyed the editor, and the paper was returned with the apology that it was not in line with the principles of the journal. He said that Ramakrishna was an Advaitist, an exponent of Absolutist Vedānta and therefore no theist. With this I still disagree.

Ramakrishna was indeed a mystic. But he never wrote anything as he had no learning. Indeed during the latter part of his life he talked ceaselessly to the people who gathered round communicating whatever he could of his spiritual experiences.

We have an authentic, almost a stenographic, record of most of the illuminating talks that Ramakrishna gave on religious themes. One of his disciples, Sri Mahendra Gupta, who out of excessive piety preferred to be known as "M", was personally present at most of these talks which he took down. His notes were in the nature of diaries, which he often showed to the Master for verification. These form at first hand a direct source of our knowledge of the teaching of Ramakrishna. He, of course, gave discourses to other disciples and to other seekers of Truth, which were not recorded at the time, but were retained in mind by the people concerned, some of whom later wrote of the days they had spent with him. This evidence also is of supreme importance as it sheds fresh light on the life and teaching of Ramakrishna. Further most of his direct disciples lived amongst us for a considerable time to bear witness to their Master.

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* *Vide Christian and Hindu Spiritual Ethics, Visvabharati Quarterly,* Vol. XVIII, Part iv, 1953.

In 1897, several years after the passing away of Ramakrishna, "M" began publishing in English some teaching based on the diaries he had kept. Although this was mere pamphleteering, Swami Vivekananda appreciated "M" 's enterprise, writing to him in October, 1897: *"C'est bon, mon ami*—now you are doing just the thing. Come out man. No sleeping all life; time is flying: Bravo! That is the way." Afterwards two volumes in English called *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras. The editor in his preface to the second edition says: "It is a series of conversations in which the highest spiritual truths were expounded by the Master in simple language with homely illustrations to disciples like Swami Vivekananda and men like Keshab Chandra Sen, Dr. Sirkar and others. These conversations were carefully recorded and preserved by an earnest and faithful householder disciple, M, and translated by him into English." However, at the instance of some of his compatriots "M" started publishing in Bengali the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna in 1902, and the whole book later ran into five volumes. It was called *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita*—nectar of the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. Recently Swami Nikhilananda brought out an English translation in one huge volume, but never mentioned that "M" was the first to render the teaching of Sri Ramakrishna in English.

A note by the Indian publisher says, "During the lifetime of "M", selections from the Bengali volumes were translated into English and published by us in two volumes in the years 1907 and 1922, each running into several editions." Swami Nikhilananda in his preface adds *"The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is the English translation of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita,* the conversations of Sri Ramakrishna with his disciples, devotees, and visitors, recorded by

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Mahendranath Gupta, who wrote the book under the pseudonym of "M" . . . . Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, has published in two volumes an English translation of selected chapters from the monumental Bengali work. I have consulted these while preparing my translation." It is unfortunate that readers of Swami Nikhilananda's book are left with the impression that he and the authorities of Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, were pioneers in so far as the English translation of Sri Ramakrishna's conversations with his disciples and devotees is concerned.

Be that as it may, I availed myself of all this material. I read and reread Sri "M" 's and other works on Sri Ramakrishna and came to the conclusion that the latter was God Himself in flesh, not merely a mystic or a great lover of God and men.

In mediaeval India Śankara and Rāmānuja developed two extreme points of view. According to the former, *Brahman,* the ultimate reality, is impersonal, while according to the latter, *Brahman* is the divine Person. They tried to justify these views by reference to Upaniṣadic texts which are considered infallible as they embody the spiritual experiences of the Indian seers of the past. But the fact remains that texts positing an impersonal *Brahman* or *Brahman* as the divine Person abound in the Upaniṣads. Such Vedāntic schools of philosophy wrangled over the nature of God. But, far from solving the problem hinted at above, they did not even grasp it. We, however, find a clear solution in the teaching of Sri Ramakrishna.

For some years now the problem of God in relation to the Absolute has been raging in the West. There the Absolutists are at a loss to locate the God of religion, the divine Person, in their scheme of reality, although they feel that they cannot explain away the phenomenon of religion. Some broached the conception of a finite God. Others again tried to explain away religion or religious consciousness altogether. There is thus no end to discussion. In Sri Ramakrishna, however, we find a master soul who went through the whole gamut of religious experience and affirmed afresh the truth of religion, and, for that matter, of all religions. The revelation in him as well as his realization throws an altogether new light on the age-old problem of God and the Absolute. This makes for an overall synthesis of religions and also for a revolution in the philosophic world.

In conclusion, I should like to point out that Swami Vivekananda did not preach Sri Ramakrishna. Instead, he laid emphasis upon Vedānta, upon the Upaniṣads as treatises on *Brahman* as impersonal Reality, and as a result he founded Vedānta Societies in America and elsewhere. He hardly even mentioned the teaching of Sri Ramakrishna in Europe or America, although he said that he owed to Sri Ramakrishna every good idea he had ever expressed in his lectures and writings. As he put it, "Nay, the power of that man has spread beyond India and if there has ever been a word of truth, a word of spirituality that I have spoken anywhere in the world, I owe it to my Master; only the mistakes are mine" (*My Master*, p. 63). He told his hearers that being a mere creature of Sri Ramakrishna, he did not consider himself fitted for the arduous task of expounding him. As a rule he trod delicately and merely represented his Master as a man of realization and of great intellectual acumen. But in a public lecture in New York he did suggest that Sri Ramakrishna was "a wave of power" from above like the Buddha or Christ. Knowing that Christianity was a religion founded upon the conception of Jesus Christ as the Son or Incarnation of God, Swami Vivekananda was shy of presenting Sri Ramakrishna in the proper light. Christians believe that there was only one historical revelation of God and that this revelation was Jesus Christ.

The main plank of Hindu theism is based on the doctrine of Incarnation which dates back to Sri Kriṣṇa who preceded Jesus Christ. But Hindus, unlike Christians, posit a number of Incarnations. This conception of plurality may appear outrageous to the Christians, but is reinforced by the life and teaching of Sri Ramakrishna. The whole subject needs elaboration. The Christian claim that there could be no other Incarnation save Jesus Christ is therefore considered in the first chapter and shown not even to be justified by the teaching of Jesus.

In the second chapter I attempt a brief sketch of the social and religious conditions of nineteenth-century India. I do so in order to show how during the first half of the last century the stage was set for the life and activities of Sri Ramakrishna. The rest of the book is devoted to the story of his life and realizations and to a detailed analysis of his teaching. There is no doubt that I have rushed in where angels fear to tread. My audacity, however, is inspired by zeal for truth as a student of philosophy. I have presented the facts and events of Sri Ramakrishna's life in a simple manner, and it is for readers to judge whether Sri Ramakrishna was merely a man or really a modern Incarnation of God. I have done my best. I shall consider my labour worth while if it stimulates some to think out the conception of Incarnation, which is being smothered by the scientific atheism and political scepticism of modern times.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge my deep debt to the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, who published in book or article form their first-hand knowledge and experiences of the Master. Their writings now rank among the religious classics of the world. I acknowledge my gratitude to all others who have written on Sri Ramakrishna in Bengali and English and from whose works I have derived much material. I also record here my thanks to Sri Ramakrishna Vedānta Math, Kathāmrita Bhavan, and the Brāhmo Samāj, Calcutta, for kind permission to use their libraries freely.

August 15, 1958
Calcutta

A. C. Das

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

INCARNATION

Often enough an individual is regarded as a quality incarnate if he is found to possess that quality in an excessive degree. Thus we say, "The Buddha was compassion incarnate", or "King Herod was cruelty incarnate." And in saying so we mean that the Buddha was a concrete embodiment of compassion as King Herod was of cruelty. But all this is only a figure of speech, not to be taken too literally as it contains some exaggeration included for effect. We can well extend this figurative meaning to the abstract sphere, to the relation between universal and particular, the former being embodied in each of its particulars. So we may say that the universal incarnates itself in the particulars. Anyway, it is not for me to discuss here how the words "incarnate" or "incarnation" are used in common literature. In religious lores the word "Incarnation" is employed in a definite sense, that of the descent of God on earth in human form through human birth.

But the mere positing of a supreme Being at the back of the universe does not entail the notion of Incarnation. Nor does the question ever arise from the viewpoint according to which God—the supreme Being—not only creates but cares for the world. Monotheistic religions indeed glory in the unity of the Deity. But the unity upon which universal brotherhood in monotheism is built is found on analysis to be only the belief in one God, who is conceived as jumping down, so to speak, at times over the gulf between Heaven and the world to regulate the course of Creation, or as occasionally sending messengers to mankind to help them adjust to their environments. Hence the conception of prophet or *nabi*. Some say that every tribal religion has its prophets or *nabis*.

It is true to say that in some religions in the past prophets played, or even today play, a magnificent rôle. There is nevertheless a considerable difference between the conception of prophet and that of Incarnation, though the latter term bears about it the sense of a message or mission.

On the other hand, according to the extreme form of Absolutism, an Incarnation, if any, is one of the illusory phenomena which constitute the cosmos. There is, of course, an Absolutist theory according to which the Absolute manifests itself in the things and beings of the world. But even on the basis of this theory, which makes the relation between the Absolute and the world very intimate, we cannot have any conception of Incarnation.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the idea of Avatara, Incarnation, is developed out of Vedānta. "In the West", he says, "this belief has never really stamped itself upon the mind because it has been presented through exoteric Christianity as a theological dogma without any roots in the reason and general consciousness and attitude towards life. But in India it has grown up and persisted as a logical outcome of the Vedāntic view of life and taken firm root in the consciousness of the race."[1] I think by "Vedānta" Aurobindo means the Upaniṣads, which are the record of the spiritual experiences or realizations of ancient Indian seers. In some contexts in the Upaniṣads some seers themselves indeed expound their experiences. But the conception of Incarnation is scarcely to be found in the principal Vedāntic texts, which teach that *Brahman,* the supreme Reality or Being, manifests itself or himself in the form of the universe and that in the ultimate state of realization the aspirant sees that *Brahman* pervades the world. This means that every finite spirit is an embodiment or an appearance of *Brahman*. But the embodiment or appearance, as we may call it, is admittedly conditioned by ignorance. If *Brahman* manifests itself or himself in the multitudinous things and beings of the world, *Brahman* does so only under a veil of ignorance—how we do not know. An Incarnation is after all a man, and apparently we do not perceive any clear difference between the two. The former, like the latter, has a body, eats, drinks and sleeps. The fact, however, remains that an Incarnation is a man with full divine consciousness, wisdom and power, remaining at the same time the Creator, Ordainer and Preserver of the universe. This is a mystery which no logic can penetrate.

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[1] Aurobindo: *Essays on the Gita,* First Series, p. 16, Calcutta, 1926.

Sri Krișņa speaks of Incarnation in the *Bhagavadgītā*. But he does not call it an *a priori* conception developed by way of an interpretation of the Upanișads. On the contrary, he teaches by example, by revealing to Arjuna that he is God Himself in a human form.

The conception of Incarnation is based on a unique kind of revelation. There is a great difference between the Vedāntic view of life and the conception of Incarnation. It may be that the latter is a dogma of religion. But the dogma means merely a formulation of the conception of the phenomenon of Incarnation which is just the content of a revelation. Surely this does not occur against any speculative background, for an Incarnation is a spiritual phenomenon. We can only know it if God through grace opens our being to it. If we grasp it we can take it as an interpretation of Reality. But from no speculative theory of Reality, howsoever profound, could we ever deduce the conception of Incarnation. It is therefore well to consider the import of the word as used in religious literature and also the spiritual tradition from which the conception derives.

To begin with, an Incarnation is clearly distinguished from a saint or a divinely-inspired person. A saint represents more an ascent of man to God than a descent of the Divine in him. Strictly, however, we cannot separate between the two. Even if God is transcendent from the point of view of empirical life, a saint is one because he is blessed with a vision of God in his spiritual experience. And so, although an aspirant approaches God by purging away his evil impulses and perfecting his true nature, ultimately it is God who determines the whole course of the aspirant's spiritual progress. Clearly, then, spiritual progress as such involves the descent of God, which, of course, happens in a subtle way. Now, if God is not wholly transcendent, but is immanent in the universe in the sense that everything that is there exists or abides in Him, spiritual progress or a lack of it is not a matter of less or more distance between God and the aspirant concerned. Spiritual life and development turns out to be an unfolding of the innermost essence of our being, which essence we share with God. So the ascent of the finite spirit and the descent of the Divine in spiritual life are two sides of the same process, or rather the same process viewed in different perspective. If the ascent means elevation, and if the finite spirit in his spiritual life is elevated, it shows that the finite spirit possesses a potentiality which, when developed, leads him to God. This ascent of the finite and descent of the Divine are the basic facts of spiritual life. They point to the deepest principle operating in the universe.

We can, then, distinguish broadly between three distinct forms of the descent of the Divine. Creation, which is not a temporal act but a manifestation of God, can be conceived as the descent of Him under the veil of ignorance or nescience. This descent, however, does not impair the nature of God as infinite. The divine Being still remains intact. It is not that God exhausts Himself in Creation just as an egg reduces itself to a broken shell by bringing a chick out of it. The supreme Being, on the contrary, deposits Himself in the finite world, so that the veil of ignorance God assumes in creating the world is progressively penetrated. This progressive unfolding of Spirit in and through Nature becomes articulate in the emergence of religious consciousness.

Again, a finite spirit in his spiritual life disciplines his body and mind with a view to grasping consciously what in his ordinary experience he but vaguely imagines. And his progress towards realization is proportionate to the descent of the Divine in him. This descent, however, means progressive revelation of God to the aspirant in his spiritual development.

There is yet a third sense in which the phrase "the descent of the Divine" is taken, this time somewhat literally. So far we have considered the descent of the Divine as a metaphysical concept and also as a spiritual revelation in the inner experience of an aspirant. God as creating goes out of Himself, so to speak, and yet remains Himself. He reveals Himself to a devotee in his spiritual experience.

God, however, descends in a different way. He often comes down to the level of finite spirits by assuming a human form through a human birth, and He does so out of His infinite love for His devotees and also to direct the course of civilization towards its ultimate goal. When a need for new adjustment in the human situation arises a "wave of power"[2] comes down. As man is not merely body, but is spirit with a material basis, the directing force must come from the spiritual plane of the universe of which the world we live in is only a visible fragment. But this is not to say that there can be no crisis on the physical plane. The course of evolution is outwardly determined by the adjustment of the evolutes to their environments. With the emergence of man on the earth, however, evolution takes a new turn. It is now the unfolding of Spirit in man.

In the remotest age primitive men were confronted with an environment that seemed threatening to them, but they grappled with it and after a long struggle gained some measure of control over it. The origin of man and the development of human nature is a long story. At all events, the history of man is not merely that of his struggle with his surroundings, but of his seekings and self-expression as well. In the beginning it was by the medium of external Nature that man sought to realize his self. But the mode of adaptation to the external world varied with different conceptions of self at different times, and through the progressive adjustment mankind later came to develop ethico-spiritual culture.

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[2] Vivekananda: *My Master,* p. 1, Almora, 1936.

Man's urge for self-realization and progress really proceeds from the supreme Being in whom he is deeply rooted. If God assumes the veil of ignorance and manifests Himself in the things and beings of the world, He embraces them all. This makes for the eventual elevation of finite spirits to the state of perfection. The universe, in short, exhibits the play of two spiritual forces. One of them is centrifugal, the other centripetal. The former functions in bringing the phenomenal world out of the Infinite, while the latter works up a return movement of the Infinite to itself out of the world. The latter functions in the development of the higher and the highest aspects of culture and civilization. So God's grace and saving force is just an aspect of His eternal creativity.

This is a subtle spiritual fact which an aspirant can only realize if God vouchsafes to him a vision of the ultimate Truth. Sometimes God appears on the earthly plane through a human birth to bring home to mankind the truth that He is the ultimate end of human life. Such a phenomenon is unique and is characterized as an Incarnation. When nescience prevails and makes men forgetful of their divine destiny, when vain intellectualism fills their minds with arrogance and gross ideas, the Divine, despite His transcendental directing of the world course, descends in a human form and moves about in the midst of mankind to give them guidance and light. "The teacher is there God Himself descended into humanity."

The divine Being is infinite and eternal ; nothing falls beyond Him. All existence is really a manifestation of God. So every conscious being or thing can be conceived as a descent of God. But, as has already been said, this is effected under cover of ignorance. When, however, God incarnates Himself in human body with human modes of activity, He does so out of grace and with full divine consciousness. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "It is the full and conscious descent of the Godhead, it is the Avatara."[3]

The doctrine of Incarnation is firmly rooted in some religions, represents one of the fundamental features of Hinduism, and is the main plank on which the Christian Faith is based. Founded upon revelation, it appears to be an enigma to men and metaphysicians alike. So it must appear; for the power of the supreme Being passes our comprehension. A metaphysician may cast out his net of categories. But how much of Reality can that net cover? Only a fragment or nothing at all. If the net is wide enough to bring within its sweep the whole range of facts from matter to consciousness, we cannot still say that Reality as such is thereby completely covered.

Reality, being infinite, eternal and absolute, defies all the attempts that metaphysicians make to exhaust its unlimited wealth of being. The truth is that speculative philosophy all too often ends with oversimplification which is marked by omissions through ignorance. Thus we are told that the so-called spiritual experiences are abnormalities and that God-visions are frauds. These, they say, are pernicious and all the more so is the doctrine of Incarnation, which is the deification of a being with all human frailties, a fact which is outrageous to speculative reason.

As is well known, Euhemerus of Messene sought to explain Greek mythology by saying that the gods and goddesses were men who had lived long ago. Their conspicuous qualities of body, mind, and heart captured the imagination of their fellow men, so that they were later thought to be divine beings. If one can thus explain away all gods and goddesses who are supposed to be denizens of Heaven far above the earthly sphere, one can more easily discard the conception of Incarnation inasmuch as an Avatara who is a God-man is supposed to pace this earth of ours.

There is, however, a limit to speculation and rationalism.

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[3] *Essays on the Gita*, First Series, p. 17, Calcutta, 1926.

We may compare the speculative philosopher to one, who, standing on the beach, staggers at the billows that surge up on the vast sea, but knows nothing of the treasures that lie deep down there. The spiritual aspirant, on the other hand, not content with a view from afar, plunges, like a diver, into the sea of Being, sinks into the depth and then emerges with the gem of spiritual light which radiates on all sides and illumines ignorant minds. The philosopher and scientist, being obsessed with their exterior view of reality, unreasonably suspect the spiritual experiences of the seers.

It is little wonder that the belief in Incarnation appears to be an enigma, even a superstition, to many.

To some again, as we have just seen, the doctrine of Incarnation is merely the cult of hero-worship. According to the rationalist, the doctrine is foolishness and to the Deist silly. If God is an extra-cosmic Being, they argue, His assumption of human form through human birth is absurd. If God chose to come down to earth, He might have come in His own original form, if He had one. On the other hand, if He is transcendent, there is obviously a gulf between Him and human beings. So, they contend, it is blasphemy to talk of God as assuming human form. The rationalist, if he in the least believes in God, conceives Him as pure spirit, and to him the conception of Avatara appears fantastic. He finds it hard to reconcile the fact of Incarnation with the infinitude of God.

Objections to the possibility of Incarnation appear at first to be formidable. But they fade away when we find that the conception of Incarnation is based on a relevant spiritual experience or revelation. Needless to say, in the sphere of revelation there is little scope for speculation. Only those who are blessed with the power of sight can see the sun when it is up in the sky. They see it and have no need to argue. Similarly those who have the power of spiritual vision recognize an Incarnation at once. For example, when Jesus was born at Bethlehem the fact was revealed to the Magi, some saints from the East. The wise men, as they were called, came to Jerusalem to see and adore the divine child. Strictly, the doctrine of Incarnation is no dogma framed out of mere fancy. The possibility of Incarnation no doubt baffles reason, but is none the less fact, although there is a mystery about it. And the mystery is the "assumption of imperfection by the perfect."[4]

In some quarters an absurd position about Incarnation is argued. Some Christians, particularly theologians, put a parochial meaning into the term "Incarnation". They maintain that the Christian Faith is based on a unique historical fact, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. They mean to say that God incarnated Himself once and for all "in the fullness of time" in Palestine. In other words, there was no Incarnation of God anywhere at any time before Jesus. They are of the opinion that the revelation in Jesus was final, in the sense that it was more than enough for all the world and for all time. They say that the whole history of Israel was a preparation for the coming of Christ and that some prophets of the Old Testament definitely made predictions about Christ the Saviour. We are told that the time was at last ripe for the divine event and that it occurred when the Jews were expecting the Messiah who was to save the chosen people of God. The Messianic idea, however, carries about it a crop of controversy.

There is no denying that the idea of the Messiah took a considerable time to develop and in the end led to the conception of the Kingdom of God, which was peculiarly Jewish, and meant just the rule of God. This was still an unfulfilled ideal which was for the most part shaped by the political situation of the Jewish people during a definite period of their history. The conception of the Kingdom of God does figure in some Old Testament writings, though it is not for me to trace its origin in any detail. It is sufficient to say that the phrase "the Kingdom of God" and the idea behind it gained in precision and poignancy under the foreign domination and oppression that the Jewish nation suffered for centuries. The conception of the Messiah—the Deliverer who was to be sent by God—became fixed in the minds of the Jews, especially during their Babylonian captivity. And the whole idea was crystallized during the Persian domination and through persecution at the hands of the Greeks and the Romans.[5]

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[4] Sri Aurobindo: *Essays on the Gita,* First Series, p. 220.

Now the Jews were eagerly awaiting the Day of Yahveh when He would intervene decisively and restore independence to His beloved people. In the generation just before the advent of Jesus, and particularly in the lifetime of Jesus, when all Israel was seething with discontent under Roman rule, this expectation was at its intensest. "The Kingdom of God" was on every tongue,[6] and the Jews were earnestly looking forward to the Day of deliverance from the foreign yoke. They were not far wrong in this as they thought the history of Israel to be a progressive revelation of God, to whom they looked to send the Messiah to save the holy land.

The end the Messiah would fulfil was indeed a political one—emancipation of the Jewish nation from foreign subjugation. He would also rule over Israel and ensure her security, prosperity, and progress. But he would not be a mere earthly king. He would, of course, govern the Jews, but he would govern them only as the one appointed by God. This conception of the Messiah is clearly different from that of Incarnation as explained above. The Jews never conceived, never could conceive the Messiah as God Himself born in flesh. He was just the great one to be sent by, and act as deputy for, God.

It is, however, pointed out that more than one prophet in the Old Testament spoke in clear terms of the coming of Christ. Thus:

1. "I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said

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[5] Wheeler Robinson: *History of Israel,* p. 134, London, 1938.

[6] James S. Stewart: *Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ,* pp. 54-55, London, 1947.

unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

"Ask of me, and I shall give *thee* the heathen *for* thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth *for* thy possession.

"Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."[7]

2. "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."[8]
3. "The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.

……………………………………………

"He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill *the places* with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries."[9]

4. "And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."[10]
5. "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."[11]
6. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."[12]
7. "But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of

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[7] *The Holy Bible*, Bible Society, London; *Psalm*, ii, 7-9.
[8] *Op. cit.*, xlv, 7.
[9] *Op. cit.*, cx, 2, 6.
[10] *Isaiah*, chap. ii, 4.
[11] *Op. cit.*, chap. vii, 14.
[12] *Op. cit.*, chap. ix, 6.

thee shall he come forth unto me *that* is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting"[13]

8. "Behold the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee.

……………………………………………

"Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.

……………………………………………

"And it shall be in that day, *that* living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be.

"And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one."[14]

9. "And *men* shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited.

"And this shall be the plague wherewith the Lord will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem. Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongues shall consume away in their mouth."[15]

Now, out of the quotations given above one can extract three conceptions, that of the Day of Yahveh, of the Messiah, and of Christ's coming. Zecharia dreams of the day when the Lord would intervene directly in human affairs, punish all the nations who fought against Israel and bring everlasting peace and prosperity to the Jewish people. On the other hand, the texts quoted above from Micah and the Psalms express a longing for the divine ruler—the Messiah. Isaiah seems to predict the coming of Christ, and his prophecies are the chief Old Testament texts to prove that some had foreseen the divine event that was yet to occur.[16]

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[13] *Micah*, chap. v, 2.
[14] *Zecharia*, chap. xiv, 1, 3, 8, 9.
[15] *Op. cit.*, chap. xiv, 11, 12.

There is no difficulty about the first two conceptions. They represent wishful thinking on the part of the Jews, who were indeed lovers of God. It is quite understandable that in their plight they looked to God for help and for redress. Further the prophets themselves had behind them the tradition of God's intervention in Israel's history. But it is rather hard to see how some of them could foresee the event of God's assuming human birth, an event which took place many centuries afterwards. It may be contended that the prophets had the power of foretelling even the distant future. Indeed we cannot say off-hand that this was not so. That some of them at least were endowed with the capacity of foreseeing the future cannot be denied.

Jeremiah and Isaiah predicted that Jerusalem would be besieged and plundered by the King of Babylon. In reply to the question by Zedekiah the King, "Is there any word from the Lord?" Jeremiah said, "There is: for, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon."[17] Moreover Isaiah told Hezekiah "Hear the word of the Lord of hosts:

"Behold, the days come; that all that *is* in thine house, and *that* which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, saith the Lord."[18] These predictions came more or less true.

It is now a commonplace that some yogis in the course of their spiritual development acquire extraordinary powers, such as clairvoyance, clairaudience, and so forth. Some Old Testament prophets probably possessed such powers. But the difficulty is that the ways of God are inscrutable, in the sense that they cannot possibly be brought within the purview of human experience. It may nevertheless be pointed out that God revealed to Isaiah that He would assume human birth for the sake of Israel. Isaiah, we may be told, only announced this fact as it was revealed to him. But, as we see, he did not know when God would be born on earth. This casts doubt upon the claim that he received a revelation from God.

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[16] B. Russell: *History of Western Philosophy*, p. 332, London, 1946.

[17] *The Holy Bible*, Bible Society, London: *Jeremiah*, XXXVII, 17.

[18] *Isaiah*, XXXIX, 5-6. All this falls in the second division of the book of Isaiah, which was the work of a different author. We, however, follow the traditional way of quoting from the book.

In the beginning of Israel's history the connection between God and the Jews was very intimate. God occasionally appeared before their leaders and often directly intervened to right the wrongs done to His chosen people. This, to be sure, formed the general background of Jewish history. Later, of course, God made Himself scarce. He only sent His word through the prophets who felt the inner voice in them to be that of God. But it is difficult to ascertain how much of their utterances were the word of God and how much their own. How could they believe, we wonder,—to use Russell's words—"that the convictions of their heart were a message of God to His people."

In those days the distance between men and God was far greater than ever before, and men had no access to Him. The prophets who only heard His word and never saw Him face to face were the intermediaries between God and the common men.[19] Obviously God's assumption of human form through human birth was not in the offing at that time. So Isaiah's message "for unto us a child is born . . . ." must have seemed blasphemous to the Jews. The first part of his statement embodies the conception of the Messiah—the princely Ruler of the Kingdom of God. But it is a big step from this idea to that of a child or son who is almighty God—the everlasting Father. For this neither was Isaiah taken to task nor was any explanation demanded of him.

Once the Jews asked Jesus who he was and would not accept his answer. He then said unto them: "I and my Father are one."[20] This was too much for the crowd. It sounded blasphemous to them, and they "took stones to stone him." Obviously, even in the time of Jesus the Jews could not think of their relation with God in terms of identity. We wonder what exactly Isaiah meant by his message. Perhaps his contemporaries found nothing more in it than the conception of the Messiah—the divine Ruler, or else they were simply mystified by his words. Anyway, that Isaiah was only expounding the conception of the Messiah is amply evidenced by what follows immediately upon the vexed passage. He continued, "Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."[21] "Messiah" meant the Ruler of the Kingdom of God who was to be sent by God.

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[19] Wheeler Robinson: *Religious Ideas of the Old Testament,* p. 11, London, 1938.

[20] *Gospel* by St. John, X, 30.

There is no doubt that the three conceptions—the Day of Yahveh, the Messiah, and Christ the Saviour were welded into the conception of Jesus as the Son of God in the primitive Church. And it can be said without fear of contradiction that the idea that Jesus was God Himself in flesh took a fairly long time to settle down in the early Church itself. During the first three centuries of the Christian era the Church, influenced by contemporary thought, modified to a great extent its original ideas. The Jews could not conceive that the Messiah should suffer. So some in the Church argued that the body of Christ was only an appearance and that he did not really suffer.

Again, we are told that two main questions were agitating the Church in the third century. One concerned the standard and regulation of Christian life, the other whether Jesus was human or divine. Such questions were often debated in the councils periodically held under the auspices of the Church. The first council held at Nicaea in 325 A.D. was marked by the well-known Arian controversy. Arius, a priest of Egypt, put forward the view that Jesus, the Son of God, was not himself God.[22]

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[21] *Isaiah*, X, 7. *Cf. The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, ed. by A. B. Davidson, pp. xvi-xvii, London, 1902.

Jesus on several occasions was transfigured before his chief disciples. He often declared in so many words that he was God Himself born to save the world. But people marvelled at him, and many set themselves against him on account of this very claim. His most beloved disciple, Peter, denied Jesus thrice,[23] and another disciple, Judas, betrayed him for thirty pieces of silver.[24] In the *Acts of the Apostles* we are told that after Jesus had risen from the dead, his disciples asked of him, saying "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" To this he replied, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons, which the Father has put in his own power."[25] The disciples had lived and moved with Jesus. They now also saw him risen from the dead. But still they continued to think of him in terms of the ruler of an earthly kingdom. What Jesus said in the context is significant. It shows that it is not for men to know the way and time God works out His plan.

If the disciples themselves were not given to probe into God's ways, we wonder how the prophets of old could have foreseen the coming of Christ the Incarnation. In some Psalms the divine Ruler is conceived as the Son of God, the one God is to send to govern and judge among nations. There is again a whole chapter (chap. 53) in Isaiah, which seems to depict in broad outline the sufferings of Jesus and to describe people's apathy towards him who in fact suffers for their sake. Now, if the texts that purport to refer to the coming of Jesus are not interpolations and if they involve much more than the Messianic idea, they present a problem for Biblical scholars to settle. But it will not do to oversimplify the issue by saying that the prediction of Christ's coming was made possible by the word of God; for, as has been indicated above, in the teachings of the prophets it is by no means easy to separate the word of God, if any, from those of the prophets themselves. In any case, it is not important whether there was any forecast of Jesus the Saviour in the Old Testament. If Jesus came and paced this earth of ours some time in the past, the prediction of it could not possibly make him more real than he was. What in fact he was we can only understand by considering his life and teaching.

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[22] Bevan: *Christianity*, pp. 80-83, London, 1932.
[23] *Matthew*, chap. XXVI, 68-75.
[24] *Op. cit.*, 15.
[25] *Acts*, chap. I, 6-7.

It is true to say that the religion of Christianity was based on the personality of Jesus and his teaching. And in this religion Jesus is looked upon as the revelation, or, which is the same thing, the Incarnation of God. I say the Incarnation of God, because, according to the orthodox Christian view, the revelation of God in the form of man is the exclusive privilege of the Christian Faith. As Emil Brünner puts it, "There is no other religion which teaches anything similar. Hinduism knows of incarnations of Vishnu, e.g., Rama, Krishna, and others; but this very plurality of incarnations indicates that here the significance of incarnation is totally different from the Christian one. None of these incarnations is understood as the saving word of grace."[26]

Again Brünner says, "The Law of God is everywhere, but the Promise of God is only in the Bible." He means by this that in Jesus, who was indeed a man, something happened that never happened before.[27] Jesus was, we are told, a turning point of history, in the sense that in him God chose to reveal Himself for the first time to mankind. That is to say, He was the sole Incarnation of God. God thus incarnated Himself to save the world, the implication being that, as God in His essence cannot be known except through His revelation, religions other than Christianity are false. And it seems that the belief that the other religions are false is part of the Christian Faith.

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[26] Brünner: *The Word and the World*, p. 35, London, 1931.
[27] Brünner: *Our Faith*, pp. 57-59, London, 1936.

Such a view was, I think, propagated first by the author of the fourth Gospel. Thus he says, "For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*".[28] This is an astounding statement; it sets at naught the spiritual traditions of other lands. It means that before the advent of Jesus the religious only aspired to a vision of God and that it was in Jesus Christ that God made Himself visible to mankind.

The statement is obviously false. There is evidence against it even in the Old Testament. There were indeed times when people knew of God, though they had no idea of an Incarnation of God. And they knew of God because of direct experience on the part of some among them. As we know, the whole Jewish religious tradition developed on the basis of the God-visions of Noah, Abraham and Moses. "Noah was a just man *and* perfect in his generations, *and* Noah walked with God."[29] God appeared in His spiritual form to Abraham and even talked to him on more than one occasion.[30] Moses in his campaign against the Pharaoh of his time had God as his visible guide and companion.[31] When Moses with his brethren moved out of Egypt and was resting near Mount Sinai, God came down on a thick cloud upon the top of the mount in a resplendent form. The people waited at the foot of the hill, saw it as if on fire and heard God speak to Moses on the mount. All this God performed to show that He did come to quicken their belief in Him.

Now we may be told that it all is to no purpose; for, does not Jesus himself say that salvation could be gained only through him? Thomas said to Jesus, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" And Jesus replied, "I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."[32] In another context He says, "I am the door"[33] and also "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness."[34]

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[28] *John*, i, 17, 18.
[29] *Genesis*, vi, 9.
[30] *Op. cit.*, xii, xvii, xviii; xv, 1, 7.
[31] *Exodus*, iii, vi, xii, xiv, xix, and so on.

Some of these words seem rather parochial and unworthy. "The only way to God" was a slogan of the early Church, and there is no difficulty about it as the early Church was after all a human organization. But how can we believe that Jesus taught that there was only one way to the Infinite? Were it so, there was no point in the teachings of the mystics who had come many centuries before the birth of Christ. It is overzeal for the new Faith that prompts the outright dismissal of all non-Christian mystics. Indeed some Christians have begun to doubt whether Jesus himself spoke these words. As Hocking puts it, "There is no only way to God. There is no only way to salvation."[35] Again, in reference to the phrase of John's Gospel, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me," Hocking says, "The spell of these words is far greater than their historical validity which may always be questioned. If they were not the words of Jesus or of Apostles, they were all the more certainly the convictions of the early Church."[36]

If, however, Jesus actually spoke the words under consideration, what did he mean by them and how were they received by his hearers? The obvious interpretation is that Christ is the only way and that Christianity is the only religion worth the name, if religion means the way to God. But Jesus might have put his point in an extreme way just to quicken faith, since the people hesitated to believe in him. Even some of his disciples were full of doubts. What else could he do? He put all the emphasis upon himself, and rightly, saying "I am the door", "I am the way and the truth." Indeed Jesus was the door, the way and the truth. But we cannot afford to forget that he was so only as an

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[32] *John*, xiv, 5-6.
[33] *Op. cit.*, x, 9.
[34] *Op. cit.*, xii, 46.
[35] *Living Religions and a World Faith*, p. 172, London, 1940.
[36] *Op. cit.*, p. 144.

Incarnation of God. God incarnates Himself to show the way that leads to Him, and the way itself is enacted in the life of the Incarnation. If we treat the words of Jesus in this way, we find that he taught nothing that might make his followers narrow in their outlook. The whole thing then hinges upon how we interpret Jesus.

It will not do to isolate a word or phrase of Jesus from its context and read our own meaning into it. There is no doubt that some often distort his meaning to suit their purposes. I shall give one example. The Pharisees came to Jesus and asked him whether it was "proper for a man to put away his wife for every cause." Jesus answered by saying that God at the beginning made men male and female ; and he meant that man and wife are "no more twain but one flesh," and added "What therefore God hath joined, let not man put asunder."[37] Now some may think that marriage is too sacred to stand in the way of spiritual progress. But did Jesus actually mean this? On hearing him say it his disciples averred that it was then not good to marry. Thereupon Jesus told them that the saying was not meant for all, but only for those who had married and were to marry. He pointed out that those who were intent on the Kingdom of God must not marry, saying "There be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."[38] Clearly, Jesus affirmed that sexual purity and continence are the *sine qua non* of attainment of the Kingdom of Heaven. But this all-important point is often overlooked.

It is, of course, true that Jesus did not clearly say whether there were or would be other Incarnations besides Him. There are, however, suggestions in His teaching as to pre-Christian and post-Christian Incarnations. He said to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw *it*, and was glad."[39] But they simply wondered and told Jesus that He could not possibly see Abraham because He was not yet fifty years old. And He continued, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."[40]

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[37] *Matthew*, xix, 6.
[38] *Op. cit.*, xix, 12.
[39] *John*, viii, 56.

This, of course, sounded preposterous to the hearers who took up stones to cast at Him. It is, however, pregnant for us, throwing new light upon our problem. If the "I" in the above statement be identical with the "I" of "I am the door" or "I am the way and the truth", we cannot help thinking that Jesus was referring to His previous births as other Incarnations.[41] Furthermore Jesus Himself said that He did not yet give out the whole truth to His disciples. In His last message to them He said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth."[42] In view of this Christians should keep their minds open and be slow to think that the whole truth has been revealed to them. God is infinite and omnipotent, and we are at a loss to understand how He could incarnate Himself, if at all, only once and at one place. As B.H.L. Hart so nicely puts it, "How dare we, bound by human limitations, make confident assertions about God's intention and revelation?"[43]

In the New Testament an account of Christ's second coming is given. Jesus said, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."[44] And again, "Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you."[45] He is supposed also to have said that when he did so he would come riding a cloud. Then he spoke of certain signs of his coming. Beforehand there would be the persecution of Christians, a global war, famine, and pestilence; the sun and the moon would be darkened, the stars would fall from the firmament. There would, in short, be overall chaos, which would portend the end of the world whereupon the Son of God would descend to solace His elect and to build the Kingdom of God upon the void that the world would become. Jesus also said that these things would happen before the generation He was speaking to was past.[46]

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[40] *Op. cit.*, viii, 58.

[41] *Cf.* "M" 's letter to Romain Rolland, *Monthly Basumati*, Vol. II, No. 1, Calcutta, 1359 B.S.

[42] *John*, xvi, 12-13.

[43] *Hibbert Journal*, Vol. XLV, No. 2, p. 100.

[44] *John*, xiv, 18.

[45] *Op. cit.*, xiv, 28.

All this is embarrassing to us inasmuch as the idea of Christ's second coming as narrated in the New Testament represents merely a revival of the old Jewish idea of the Day of Yahveh, which meant that God would intervene one day and safeguard the interests of His people—the Jews—by punishing the wicked nations in all possible ways. One explanation, however, suggests itself, that the early Christians under pressure of persecution were led to conceive of a day of vindication of their faith when the unrighteous would be destroyed and the Son of God would come down to establish the Kingdom of God.

It all depends on how we interpret the texts. Jesus might have spoken to His disciples of His coming again either in His spiritual form as He appeared to them after resurrection, or in a new birth. Swami Shivananda, a great mystic and a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, pointed out that the doings of an Incarnation were beyond the reach of the average intellect. He also asserted that when God incarnated Himself He did so for no particular race or nation, but for the good of the whole world.[47] That is why Jesus ordained His disciples and charged them to spread the message on all hands, to all nations, that He had come. The egoist interprets this to show that Jesus is the only way.

There is no doubt that God speaks through the Bible, but He also speaks through other scriptures. For Hindus, for instance, the *Bhagavadgītā* contains the words that Sri Krișṇa—an Incarnation of God—spoke to Arjuna. Sri Krișṇa says, "Verily this divine illusion of Mine, constituted of the Guṇas, is difficult to cross over ; those who devote themselves to Me alone cross over this illusion."[48] He continues in the same strain in many other contexts.

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[46] *Luke*, xxi.

[47] *Prabuddha Bhārata*, October, 1945.

This raises a question which the exponents of the "only way" must settle. If there is only one way to God, only one Incarnation, we cannot here settle between the Bible and the *Bhagavadgītā*. Emil Brünner himself raises this point and seeks to solve it by saying that a different voice is to be heard in the non-Christian scriptures from that which we hear in the Bible. Now, if we find the two voices to be different, it may be because we are in a hurry, or because God speaks in different voices at different times. And Brünner admits this when referring to the *Gītā* he says, "It may be that it is God's voice, too."[49] This is a crucial point, which serves to clarify the whole conception of Incarnation.

As has already been said, the conception of Incarnation is hardly hinted at in the Veda and Upaniṣads, though it is the cornerstone of the Bhāgavata religion which presumably dates back to the Upaniṣadic age. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, of course, mentions that Prajāpati, the Creator, took the forms of Tortoise and Boar for some cosmic actions.[50] But this is not an Incarnation in the accepted sense. These forms of Prajāpati were obviously mere symbols for some subtle processes involved in cosmic evolution. The conception of Incarnation as a descent of the Divine for a divine purpose was not clarified at that stage.

Swami Saradananda, the renowned disciple and biographer of Sri Ramakrishna, tries to trace the conception of Incarnation to the Veda and Upaniṣads. But unfortunately he holds several views at the same time.[51] First, Rishis, the seers of the Vedic times, were not then regarded as Incarnations ; second, in the theistic movement in India, which he thinks, followed upon the Upaniṣadic age, the great spiritual personalities were considered Avataras ; third, the conception of Avatara developed on the basis of the worship of *gurus* or teachers; fourth, the idea of the special descent of God derived from the spiritual realization of *Brahman* manifesting itself in the form of the universe; fifth, it was inspired by the sense of divine grace as determining spiritual life; and sixth, it is the conscious formulation of the revelation of God in human form by human birth from age to age.

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[48] *Gītā*, VII, 14: *Vide Bhagavad-Gita*, by Swami Swarupananda, p. 170, Almora, 1940.

[49] *Our Faith*, p. 20.

[50] *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Part III, S.B.E., Vol. XLI, pp. 147, 390.

[51] *Sri Ramakrishna-Līlāprasanga* (in Bengali), Part I, pp. 3-10, Calcutta.

Now, if the last-mentioned view is legitimate, and if the illustrious Swami accepts it as he does, how can he at the same time sponsor the other views given above. In regard to the first and the second view I should like to point out that the conception of Incarnation does not mean the deification of any man, but only an objective revelation of God. One may be impressed by the spiritual qualities and powers of a seer, and one may consider him to be a superman, or even a god. But we do not see how one can form except arbitrarily the idea of God in a human form only on the basis of the conception of a superman.

Again, there is a long distance between the theory of Incarnation and hero-worship. The latter only implies that there were some persons who by reason of their extraordinary abilities became guides and teachers to their fellow men. There was a clear difference between the heroes, as they were called, and common men. Hero-worship, however, scarcely brings the Divine down to the human level. The Rishis of the Veda and Upaniṣads were seers; they saw and received the Word of God. They did not, however, become God. There is no gainsaying the fact that in some Purāṇas some Vedic seers were regarded as Incarnations of God. But this only shows that the conception of Incarnation was applied wrongly to those Rishis.

As regards the third view, the conception of the *guru* or teacher as an embodiment of *Brahman* or God is only subjectively determined. The aspirant is to look upon his teacher as *Brahman* or God in a visible form. This is pure symbolism which may have proved effectual to the aspirant concerned in his spiritual progress. But the teacher is a human being, not God, objectively considered. So teacher-worship is only another, or perhaps a higher, form of hero-worship.

As to the fourth view, it should be noted that in the Upaniṣads we do not find the least conception of Incarnation, although in many contexts therein seers speak of *Brahman* or Self as manifesting in the things and beings of the world. And the reason is that there is much difference between the idea of the manifestation of *Brahman* or God and that of the Incarnation of God. It may indeed be argued that the manifestation of God Himself in the form of the world is a revelation. But the latter is of a fact, that is, or better, of a spiritual truth. Even if we allow that it is a revelation of God, it does not improve matters. It relates only to that aspect of God which is exhibited in the emergence of the world. One cannot assuredly pass from one form of revelation to another on *a priori* grounds. No such logical deduction is possible in the case of God who, needless to say, transcends the human intellect.

Lastly, it is easy to show that the fifth view is untenable. If it means that one becomes aware of divine grace and direction in one's spiritual life, it does not necessarily mean that God comes or would come down and be born on earth in a human form with full divine consciousness. The supreme Being in His essential nature is *ex hypothesi* suprahuman and transcends the world. How could He then be born as a man with full divine glory? This is the main point. We are hard put to explain it, but we cannot explain it away altogether.

The first clear statement about Incarnation is found in the *Bhagavadgītā,* which is some centuries older than the New Testament. Therein Sri Kriṣṇa says to Arjuna, "Many are My lives that are past, and thine also, O Arjuna; all of them I know but thou knowest not, O Scourge of the foe (Arjuna)."[52] Here is no scope for speculation. God in a human form says that He incarnated Himself many times in the past and that whereas He remembers it all, Arjuna is quite oblivious of his past lives. How is this possible? What is there to show that there should be such a difference between Sri Krisṇa and Arjuna? Sri Krisṇa Himself explains it. He now goes into the question of Incarnation or the divine birth of God. He first of all narrates how and why God assumes human birth and then pointedly refers to Himself as God. He says that, though God is eternal and imperishable and the Lord of the universe, yet with His own nature intact He assumes an empirical form through His power.[53] There is a divine plan or purpose behind the divine birth.

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[52] Radhakrishnan: *Bhagavadgītā,* p. 153, London, 1948.

God manifests Himself in the world and keeps His essential nature intact when so doing.[54] In this manifestation a lower aspect of His nature functions, bringing into existence forms and things that cover the real and true from the vision of men. This Sri Krisṇa calls His divine *māyā* which expresses itself in the shape of subtle forces, sattva, raja and tama, playing in the phenomenal world. The divine *māyā* is the source of ignorance and delusion which one discerns only through His grace.[55]

There is, however, a higher aspect of God's nature, by which He holds the world and pervades it in a subtle form.[56] If God appears in a human form with His full divine consciousness and glory, He does so by a still higher power, which is His self-*māyā,* that power of *māyā* which concerns Him and reveals Him in His perfect being. As Sri Krisṇa puts it, "Whenever religion declines and irreligion prevails, I manifest Myself in a human form to establish righteousness and to destroy evil."[57] It is a pregnant statement which means more than meets the eye.

Sri Krisṇa avers that history does not indicate a uniform line of progress, though its drift is towards the spiritual destiny of humanity. He brings out the fact that there are ups and downs in man's march towards his goal. Indeed some cycles are marked by progress in knowledge, moral attainments and spiritual realization. Sometimes again human culture and civilization take a retrograde step, while man's rational nature and sense of spiritual values get smothered by his animal urges. When the human world falls into utter confusion, when men's spiritual vision becomes blurred and their sense of value blunted, God, says Sri Krişṇa, assumes a human form through a human birth to help mankind. But this does not mean that God except in His Incarnation remains indifferent to the world. He is the supreme Reality and as such ordains all things to the minutest details of the universe. If God pervades the universe, He is invisible in His immanence there.[58] He is the unseen teacher who eternally directs the course of the world. He, however, chooses to descend in a visible form to give light and direction in a tangible way to mankind. Sri Krişṇa thus formulates the purpose of divine birth on earth. As has been stated above, God is born into a human form to set before men their ideal of spiritual realization, to show them that they are rooted in Reality and that each of them is a spark from the divine Fire. God is born also to create proper conditions, socio-moral and religious, for the realization of the ideal by destroying irreligion and the evil forces that retard righteousness.

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[53] *Bhagavadgītā*, IV, 6.
[54] *Op. cit.*, IX, 8.
[55] *Op. cit.*, VII, 14.
[56] *Op. cit.*, VII, 5 ; IX, 4.
[57] *Op. cit.*, IV, 7-8.

Can we, then, say that an Incarnation comes in the fullness of time? Of course, we can. But the phrase "the fullness of time" is to be taken in terms of the decline of righteousness and the prevalence of irreligion. There is, however, difficulty about this. We cannot know when the time is full for the coming of God until our spiritual eyes are opened. Left to ourselves, we are in confusion about spiritual matters, and in such a state we often take irreligion for religion and foster egoism and pride in the name of spiritual values and virtues. So most of us can never know that we are given to evils of all sorts and that a rectification is an imperative need.

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[58] *Op. cit.*, IX, 4-5; also *The Sayings of Ramakrishna* by Swami Abhedananda, p. 3, New York, 1903.

When Jesus was born, religion among the Jews, generally speaking, was reduced to a mass of formalities and was being exploited for evil purposes. Nevertheless, the Jews considered themselves the most religious people in the world. No wonder that when God came down in the form of Jesus out of grace to give them guidance and light, all but a few rejected Him outright. They even had the hardihood to call Him an impostor and to nail Him to the Cross. On the other hand, those who are obsessed with the idea of imperfection in the ways of life are ever on the look-out for an Incarnation, if, of course, they believe that God incarnates Himself from time to time to right the wrongs of the world. That is why they are prone to regard as an Incarnation of God anyone whom they think to possess extraordinary qualities and powers.

This partly explains how false Avataras appear. They are the creations of fancy. But we should not be confused, as they do not detract from an Incarnation in the true sense. Obviously an individual can only be falsely conceived as an Incarnation if the idea is current at the time. We insist that the conception of Incarnation is derived from a revelation of God in the form of man. An analogy is helpful here. A counterfeit coin posits a valid one. And we only know a coin to be counterfeit if we know what a valid one is like. However, if a man is blind, both to him are equally dark. If we are spiritually blind—as most of us are—there is no question for us to settle. We are in the dark and have simply to pray to God to lead us to light. Nevertheless, some work out details by analyzing the conditions of Jewish life immediately before the advent of Christ in order to show that the time was ripe for Him to come. At that time the Jews were in political subjection which led to social chaos, religious degradation, and economic disruption.

Palestine, we are told, was then the "Centre of the

World", the meeting place of the three continents, Asia, Europe, and Africa; there was "the Roman peace" that covered so many different countries; there were also "Roman roads" which together formed a great unifying force, and so on. As Dr. Stewart puts it, "It was no haphazard that made Bethlehem and Nazareth and Calvary the cradle of the Christian faith. It was the best possible place for the launching of a world religion."[59] Is it then that God was looking for a convenient time and also for a suitable place and that at last He found it in Palestine? But the point is that, if God was to be born among the most degraded and depressed people in order to fulfil the divine purpose, one may rightly say that Jesus ought to have appeared among the Jews much earlier at a more critical period of their history, especially during their Babylonian captivity when some of their prophets testified to the evils that pervaded Jewish life at that time.

In the same way during the first World War, some expected God to come and set the world right. Again during the last World War a vast number of Germans implicitly believed that God who gave the Jews a world religion at last appeared among them to give them world domination. Today we all tremble as we think of the atom bomb. Some nations of the world, knowing the terrible consequences of atomic warfare, are competing desperately in an armament race. Bickering has broken out in the international arena and seems to be endless. A small corner of the globe has even been set ablaze. The humble, the meek and the pious think that now is the time for the coming of an Avatara to save civilization from total annihilation.

All this is vain; man is far too small a being to dictate to God and far too ignorant to know His ways. Assuredly, if God ever incarnates Himself, He does so not to launch a campaign in behalf of any people or any particular religion. He takes birth in a particular nation, but He belongs to the whole world. He launches only truth which is the soul of religion. And only He knows where and when to launch it. He alone can say "The time is full, and the kingdom of heaven is at hand." We human beings can know that the time is full when He actually comes.

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[59] *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ*, p. 18.

Some, however, make light of divine Incarnation as ordinarily conceived and lay emphasis upon the immanence of the Divine in man. They maintain that it is not very important whether Sri Krișṇa or Jesus Christ ever lived. Even if they are myths, the fact remains that there is an eternal Incarnation in every human being.[60] Others, again, seek to explain away Incarnation altogether. According to them, an Incarnation is not so much the descent of God into flesh as the elevation of man to God.[61] They point out that the conception of Incarnation is only a symbolical representation of the divine birth for which each of us is destined. They take the Christian doctrine of resurrection to mean man's spiritual rebirth, and interpret the whole idea of Incarnation in terms of resurrection. We are told that the Lord resides in the heart of every man, but remains hidden in the innermost recess there. When we shall be able to tear away the veil of ignorance from our spiritual nature, they say, we shall see that God is the self of our selves. Then our ordinary empirical consciousness would be transfigured into the abiding consciousness of the Eternal in us and the universe. This resurrection is, then, the rise from the body-mind consciousness to one which is altogether new. This is the divine birth—the birth into spirit. "Incarnation" means simply this.

This view shows that an Incarnation is merely a man in the ultimate state of spiritual perfection in which he enjoys ecstatic union with God. The two views just analyzed seem to be inspired by a somewhat sceptical attitude towards the possibility of God assuming human birth. A detailed comment is unnecessary here. As has already been indicated, if we make a philosophical approach to the spiritual phenomenon of Incarnation, we can scarcely escape scepticism. And if anybody is really sceptical of Incarnation, we cannot convince him. Conviction can come to him only through the grace of the Lord. That God revealed Himself through human birth is on record in the words of God Himself. Now, if we cannot persuade ourselves to believe them, we must at least keep our minds open.

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[60] Sri Aurobindo: *Essays on the Gita*, First Series, pp. 18-19, Calcutta, 1926.

[61] Radhakrishnan: *Bhagavadgītā*, p. 36.

It is not proper for us in our scepticism born of ignorance to explain away Incarnation with the help of familiar concepts. It is a crucial point whether God ever in the past assumed a human birth. If He actually did so, it must revolutionize the conception of God as we have hitherto been able to form and also our metaphysical view of the world.

We appreciate the view that resurrection symbolizes the ascent of man to God, his birth or rebirth into spirit, which is avowedly the ultimate end of human existence. But there is a world of difference between the conception of resurrection so interpreted and that of Incarnation. No matter whether the latter is fact or not, the idea is there, and it means that God took or takes on a human birth. The conception is outraged when it is affiliated to that of resurrection or rebirth into spirit. We fail to grasp why people should indulge in the absurd symbol of God assuming a human form just to show that man, a physico-mental being, is to evolve into Spirit.

There is a real difficulty in grasping the possibility of Incarnation. God is infinite and eternal. How then can He assume a finite form? Doubts assail our minds, because we are ignorant of divine things. Sri Kriṣṇa says, "Unaware of My higher state as the great Lord of beings, fools disregard Me, dwelling in the human form."[62] How many of His contemporaries could know that Sri Kriṣṇa was God Himself in human flesh? Since His life in the womb of His mother

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[62] *Bhagavadgītā,* IX, 11.

Devaki He had manifested His divine powers. But those only knew Him, to whom He revealed Himself. The unsophisticated clear-visioned men and women of Brindāvan were far nearer to His divine nature than most of the people with whom He came into contact on the larger arena of His later life.

One day Yasoda, the foster mother of Sri Krișṇa, made Him, when just a child, open His mouth to see whether He had eaten some earth. But lo! when the divine child opened His mouth she saw inside the whole choir of heaven and earth.[63] She was at once transformed and in a transport. When Brindāvan was threatened with an unprecedented hailstorm and rain the boy, Sri Krișṇa, took up the Gobardhan hill in His hands and held it up as an umbrella for seven days.[64] When Arjuna and his brothers were living in exile in a forest Sri Krișṇa, now a full-grown man, happened to be there and fed a very large number of mendicants with a few morsels of rice and vegetables that were left over from lunch in the cottage of His friends. And so on.

But to the people Sri Krișṇa was only a man, although one of outstanding qualities. Even Arjuna who was His friend and sometime constant companion was full of doubts about his divine guide. These doubts were only dispelled when Sri Krișṇa transfigured Himself before Arjuna on the battle field of Kurukshetra and revealed to him His cosmic forms.

Jesus too performed what we call a miracle. But these miracles only manifested His divine powers. He touched the blind, and they could see ; He said to the lame, "Rise and walk", and they rose and walked ; He touched the lepers, and they became whole ; He touched Lazarus who was dead, and he rose. On different occasions Jesus was given a few loaves and fishes, and with them He fed five thousand, seven thousand, and they ate their fill. People who witnessed these feats marvelled at Him. But their spiritual vision was not opened. They talked to one another about what He had done, but they could not forget that He was the son of Joseph the carpenter and Mary. That was their way. That is the way of the common men. The human form that God assumes is a bar to their vision. Mere physical vision will not do ; they must be given spiritual vision. But the latter comes only through the grace of God. They only see who are given to see.

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[63] *Bhāgavata*, X, chap. viii, 37-38.
[64] *Op. cit.*, X, chap. xxv, 22-24.

There are two aspects in an Incarnation—the divine and the human and the one cannot be severed from the other. Like an ordinary human being, an Incarnation is born of a woman and has a body with hands and feet. He lives like a normal man and passes through the normal stages of human life. Occasionally He even suffers from bodily ailments. There is, however, a basic difference between an Incarnation and a common man. An Incarnation throughout His life is centred in full divine consciousness. Unlike ordinary mortals, He performs all His actions in divine wisdom and for a divine purpose. And He does so only because He is the divine teacher. He teaches not merely by words, but also and more by example. He Himself practises what He preaches. It is for this reason that He takes on the appearance of a common man and dramatizes in His life the way men should follow in their approach to God. Nay, He does much more than this. He comes to give a lift to those of His devotees whom He elects to elevate by taking their ills upon Himself. So we may say, He comes also to suffer for men.

Sometimes an Incarnation suffers apparently for no cause. Consider the deaths of Sri Krișṇa, Jesus, and Sri Chaitanya. Sri Krișṇa allowed Himself to be shot by the arrow of an ignorant hunter who mistook Him for a bird, Jesus died on the Cross, and Sri Chaitanya jumped into the sea at Puri. That is why people generally miss an Incarnation and put a premium upon a saint or yogi. There are, as we know, methods of yoga which, when properly followed, make for perfect health. This, for example, is the objective of the Haṭha-yogi, who is out to master the physico-vital processes in the body. But perfect health is not necessarily the index of spiritual perfection. If an Incarnation suffers, He does so not for any of His deeds. He is absolutely free and is not bound in the nexus of causation or Karma. He suffers of His free choice for the sake of humanity. His sufferings themselves are divinely determined.

Aspirants in their high spiritual development often acquire extraordinary powers, which, when displayed, cast a glamour about them. It captures the imagination of ordinary people. But what are these powers like? They represent but a modicum of the omnipotence of God. The more a devotee is spiritually transformed the more he approaches God and within limits partakes of these powers.

Sri Krișṇa speaks of supernormal yogic powers in some detail.[65] He mentions as many as eighteen of them. Eight, He says, reside in the full degree in the Lord of the universe, while spiritual aspirants come as a matter of course to possess the remaining ten. The power of reducing the body to an atom, of immensely enlarging it, of making it extremely light, of coming into relation with the senses of birds, beasts and fishes, omniscience, the power of rousing the latent capacities in things and beings, absolute dispassion or detachment, and the power of terminating all desires—these eight—are the powers of the Lord. The other ten are: the cessation of hunger and thirst in the body, clairvoyance, clairaudience, bodily movement commensurate with that of the mind, acquisition of the desired form, the power of entering another man's body, death at will, the power of enjoying the play of gods with the Apsaras—the heavenly dancers, the attainment of the desired object, and the power of unobstructed command. Sri Krișṇa also mentions five other lesser powers, such as knowing things past, present and future, enduring heat and cold, telepathy, control over the sun, fire, water and poison, etc. and invincibility.[66]

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[65] *Bhāgavata,* XI, chap. xv.

[66] *Cf. Pātañjala Yoga-Sūtra,* III, 45.

It is said there that an aspirant acquires the power of reducing the body to an atom and of making the body immensely large, etc. when he

It is then no wonder that an Incarnation often works miracles. But we cannot make much of it. As we see, spiritual aspirants, yogis and devotees at a developed stage of their spiritual life partake of some powers of God as mentioned above. So an Incarnation is not to be known solely by the miracles He performs. They are not the proper measure there. As is well known, Jesus gave His disciples the all-round power of healing. But that did not make them equal to Him. While supernatural power was natural to Jesus, in His disciples it was only a free gift from Him.

It is a mistake to think that Jesus displayed His superhuman powers by working miracles. Like any other Incarnation, He came to heal the world. His mission was the spiritual uplift of men. But, as He went about, He came across countless people suffering from diseases and deformities. Out of sheer compassion He touched them, and they were healed. However, that was not very important; for by so doing He could only attract a multitude and mystify them. There is, however, one miracle worth the name which is ascribed to an Incarnation. It is the transformation of someone's whole inner being and outlook by a mere look or touch. Jesus found the men who later became His closest friends and devotees at different places. He called them, and they responded. For example, He saw Peter and Andrew casting their net on the sea to catch fish. He called out to them, and they left all to follow Him. This was far more significant than raising someone from the dead, far more incomprehensible than making a leper whole. And the only explanation we can give is that the mere sight, the mere word of Jesus, brought an overall change upon the fishermen of Galilee. They rose from a life of filth and squalor to one of faith and spirit and were transformed into saints.

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has by yoga gained mastery over the elements. But this does not contradict what Sri Krișṇa says about His powers as the Lord. The idea is that the Lord Himself imparts a fraction of His intrinsic powers to the yogi who has mastered his lower nature. But the yogi may be in the illusion that he has acquired them by sheer force of yoga.

Sri Chaitanya through His grace raised Jagai and Madhai, the two wickedest men of the time, from the rut of depravity to the blissful life of spirit. By a mere glance He lifted Sārvavauma, who was a great Sanskritist, into the state of God-realization.[67] The annals of the world show that only such persons as are considered Incarnations were capable of effecting such transformations. And the transformation of the individual concerned was linked to the revelation of God in human form which an Incarnation took for *līlā,* for His divine purpose. Still there is no end of doubt. How can one believe that the Infinite is embodied in a form which measures only three and a half cubits.

A man of science one day repudiated the idea of Incarnation before Sri Ramakrishna by saying that he could not humble himself before a man who was born and destined to die, who excreted dirt and urine.[68] But the scientist did not realize that an Incarnation is not merely a man. To see God in an Incarnation needed spiritual vision which would come only through divine grace. Ramakrishna pointed out that an Avatara was one who granted salvation and that there were an infinite number of Avataras, of whom some only revealed themselves to man.[69] When Ramachandra came to the world only a few sages knew Him truly, and the rest of men thought that He was the son of Dasaratha, king of Oyodhya. An Incarnation is like a large log of wood drifting down a stream, on which many animals can cling and rest, while an ordinary saint is like a small plank which sinks even when a crow sits on it. An ordinary yogi perfects himself by attaining God. But he cannot bring God-consciousness or salvation to anybody. An Incarnation, on the other hand, saves a multitude of souls and causes a spiritual inundation. He is like a wave of the sea. He proceeds from the Boundless or Infinite. The conception of Incarnation as the Son of God is therefore significant. But a wave cannot be separated from the sea of which it may be regarded as an expression. So also an Incarnation cannot be considered apart from God. The former is a revelation of God and in a way is God Himself. When God incarnates Himself, He does not contract His infinitude into a finite form. He assumes one, but it simply marks the point where He reveals Himself to His elect. To see a wave of the ocean is to see the ocean itself. So also to see the Son of God, an Incarnation, is to see God Himself.

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[67] S. K. Ghose: *Amiya Nimai Charit* (in Bengali), Part III, p. 173, Calcutta, 1327 B.S.; also Brindavana Das: *Chaitanya Bhāgavata,* ed. by M. K. Ghose, 4th ed., last Part, p. 333, Calcutta, 440 G.A.

[68] *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* Vol. II, 2nd ed., p. 321, Madras, 1928.

[69] *Op. cit.,* p. 317.

Though an Incarnation assumes a body, yet His body is not like that of any human being. It is of purest stuff, and the "I", unlike that of a matter-of-fact man, is like a film through which the pure in heart can see. Ramakrishna explained this with beautiful imagery. Suppose that somewhere on an endless field there is a high brick wall, and that on one side of it there stands a man. Now if there be holes in the wall the man can see, and if they are large enough he can even pass through them. The ego of an ordinary man is like the walls that surround a small area. The ego of an Incarnation, on the other hand, is like a big hole in the wall on the field mentioned above. An Incarnation can therefore remain on the earthly plane and can also pass into the Infinite at will. Nay, even while in the body and mind, He remains God-centred, because He is God Himself in a human form. Sometimes He manifests His divine nature and power. Sometimes again He shows Himself to be weak and feeble. As we know, Sri Kriṣṇa once held a whole hill in his hands. But once in the house of Nanda, His foster father, He showed that He was too weak to move a stool. That is God's way. God incarnates Himself to give direction, as we say, to civilization. Primarily, however, He comes down to the human plane with His divine glory to give perfect satisfaction to His devotees by presenting Himself to them in a concrete earthly form. It is for this reason that many devotees come into the world with the Lord who assumes a human birth to be visibly enjoyed by them.[70]

But an Incarnation does not exhaust Himself when He has fulfilled His mission in the world, He is not absorbed into the Infinite. He continues for ever in Heaven in His spiritual form. As the perfect ones tell us, Heaven or *Vaikuṇṭha* is no figment of the imagination. Heaven in the strict sense means that spiritual realm where the Lord resides in His eternal personal spiritual form with His perfect devotees. And with the emergence of a new Incarnation a new region or *Loka* comes into being in that realm and the imperishable spiritual form of the Incarnation becomes the presiding Deity there.[71] This throws a new light upon a statement of Jesus, which otherwise remains obscure. He said to Peter, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."[72]

The death of an Incarnation does not then mean the end of His being and activity. After death an Incarnation persists in His perennial spiritual form. He often presents Himself in this form to His devotees. Blessed are those who see Him in this form. The Christian doctrine of resurrection doubtless points to the fact that Jesus after Crucifixion appeared to His disciples in His pure spiritual form. With Christians, however, the resurrection of Jesus means that He rose bodily from the grave. Jesus appeared to His devotees and then ascended to Heaven. But there is no point in saying that He rose in His earthly body to Heaven. Heaven is, to be sure, no physical realm. So Jesus could not possibly carry His physical body there.

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[70] *Kathāmrita* (in Bengali) by "M", Vol. V, x, 2 ; I, xiv, 8 ; *Sayings of Ramakrishna* by Swami Abhedananda, chap. II, New York, 1903 ; *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* II, p. 355.

[71] This point was made clear to me in a talk with the late Swami Abhedananda of the Ramakrishna Vedānta Math, Calcutta. *Cf. Journal of Royal Asiatic Society,* 1909, p. 622; also S. K. Dey: *History of Early Vaiṣṇava Theology,* p. 191; Sanātana Goswami: *Brihadbhāgavatāmritam,* II, iv, pp. 156-157.

[72] *John,* xiv, 2.

The doctrine of resurrection, however, suggests a problem. Some time after the burial of Jesus Mary Magdalene, Peter, and others came and looked into the grave, but did not find the body there. Where then did it go? They were satisfied that it was not stolen or otherwise destroyed, and they were in a fix. Their puzzle was only solved when Jesus appeared to them as He was when living. This was a new phenomenon to the disciples. There was nothing in the Jewish tradition to explain it, and the disciples were left with the impression that Jesus rose bodily from the dead. The rumour spread that He was risen. The fact, however, was that Jesus was now in His spiritual form, which exactly resembled His earthly form. As His disciples could not quite grasp this, they formed the view that goes even to this day by the name of the resurrection of Christ.

Indians for their part do not find any difficulty about it. They are convinced that a human being after his death continues in a subtle body consisting of his senses, mind, basic ideas and impulses. This conviction forms part of the Indian spiritualistic tradition and is based on the yogic experience of the world of the dead. It is a commonplace in India that saints and sages after their death often appeared in forms resembling those in which they lived on earth, not to speak of the Incarnations of the past. Anyway, if the body of Jesus was not found in the grave where it had been laid and if its disappearance could not be explained, what could the disciples of Jesus guess except that He was risen from the dead? Quite a reasonable explanation is, however, open to us.

According to a tradition, Sri Chaitanya on His last day on earth entered the temple of Jagannath—the Lord of the universe at Puri in an ecstatic mood, and did not appear to come out and was seen no more. They say that His body merged into the image of the Lord in the temple.[73]

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[73] Biman Behari Majumdar: *Sri Chaitanya Chariter Upādān* (in Bengali), p. 277, Calcutta, 1939; S. K. Ghose: *Amiya Nimai Charit* (in Bengali), 3rd ed., Part VI, p. 263, Calcutta, 1328 B.S.

According to others, one day Sri Chaitanya when God-intoxicated jumped into the sea and bodily entered into the Lord. This explanation was made because His body could not be traced, though a thorough search was made. Similar things are narrated about other Indian mystics, particularly Mirabai. But was such a thing possible?

In the *Bhagavadgītā* it is said that at the time of death the soul leaves the outworn body and enters a subtle one just as a man discards an old garment and puts on a new one.[74] We also find in the *Brihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* an account of death which runs like this: Just as a leech goes to the end of a blade of grass and holding another blade withdraws itself from the former one, so the self at the time of death leaves the body and takes a new one.[75] Indeed, as we see, the soul or spirit generally passes away and the lifeless inert body is left behind. But in some cases, we are told, no trace of the body is left. If all this was no legend, an explanation is needed, and several have in fact been made.

Some advance a very extreme view, maintaining that matter itself is a form of spirit and that a case like that described above is one of matter turning back into spirit.[76] All that is meant is that with some mystics at least the body itself is spiritualized, not spirited away. As matter is veiled spirit, some mystics choose to crystallize it into spirit. Obviously this view is based on oversimplification. Can we say that the relation between matter and spirit is like that between ice and water? Clearly, ice is a form of water, a form which is contrary to the nature of water as such. Water is liquid and has no colour. But ice is hard and white. However, when a block of ice melts the hard and transparent form evaporates away. On the other hand, water taken at the zero degree of heat becomes ice. Such being the case, it is very difficult to say which of the two is the original stuff, water or ice. If we say that water is the original element, ice as a form of it is only temporary, if not illusory. Now, if spirit is original reality and matter a form of it, matter can under appropriate conditions be transformed into spirit. But man is body-spirit, not mere matter. He is a soul tethered to a body, and the soul uses the body as an instrument. There is therefore no question of a man's body becoming spirit.

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[74] II, 22.
[75] IV, iv, 3.
[76] *Advent*, April, 1951, p. 86.

If God ever created matter by way of His manifestation in the world, matter as a form of His manifestation does not represent any transformation, in the strict sense, of the divine being. There is then no point in the proposal to spiritualize matter. God manifests Himself and we can only think that He may not have done so at all. In any case, matter, life, and mind being specific modes of the manifestation of God remain and must remain distinct, though God as the Infinite pervades all existence. If we hold that the perfecting of an individual involves the transforming of his body into spirit, that the attainment of perfection entails the evaporation of the body, such evaporation must occur at the very moment of the attainment of perfection. But the Buddha continued in the body for a considerable time after he had attained to the Light, and he passed away leaving his body behind. There might be some exceptional cases in which the body seemed to have been spirited away. But the hypothesis that the body of a saint or mystic may be spiritualized, be transformed into spirit, appears to be far-fetched and is not supported by any legitimate conception of Creation.

We have, nevertheless, a more plausible explanation to offer, which is consistent with yogic tradition. We have considered above the extraordinary powers that accrue to devotees and yogis at a high stage of their spiritual development. One is called *animā*, or the power of reducing the body to the size of an atom and thus making it invisible to the eye. It is quite likely that this power becomes manifest in some yogis at the time of death, the result being that they seem bodily to disappear for good. The case of Jesus, however, was peculiar in the sense that He died on the Cross, so that His body was still there and later was buried. So it is hard to affiliate the case of Jesus to the rule formulated above. Even if we grant that His body was etherealized by a yogic power which came into operation when He was on the Cross, the fact remains that the body, even in its subtle invisible form, must have been left in the grave as death means the separation of the soul from the body. We can thus explain the disappearance of the body of Jesus. But the body was of small account. What is important is that Jesus now appeared in His spiritual form, which filled His disciples with enlightened confidence and inspired them with new hopes. The spiritual form had a tremendous transforming influence wherever it appeared. That was really a unique phenomenon which gave the faith of the disciples the full measure of certainty. That was consequently no mere ghost-seeing. Unlike the apparition of an ordinary dead man, the spiritual appearance of Jesus had an elevating effect. To take a conspicuous example. Saul, when he was out to persecute Christians, had a vision of Christ on the road to Damascus and was completely transformed. Similar events testify to the fact that Jesus was an Incarnation of God. Christianity being based on the life and words of Jesus must reckon with the highly spiritual phenomenon of resurrection, especially in view of the fact that in Jesus Christ the Jews for the first time encountered an Incarnation.

We may in this connexion consider the Hindu conception of ten Incarnations.[77] They are: Fish, Tortoise, Boar, Man-lion, the Dwarf, Parasurām, Rāma, Hali-Rāma, the Buddha, and Kalki (yet to come). They have become a source of great confusion, including as they do animal forms. It is maintained that God in the past appeared thus on nine different occasions to perform some actions in the world. But nobody can say with certainty when this theory was first propounded. It is, however, clear that it somehow took shape during the post-Buddhist period. Some seek to explain it away as pure mythology. Others recognize in the theory a worthy attempt to analyze the stages of evolution or to assimilate the fundamental elements of other religions into the Hindu Faith. Others again hold that the theory shows simply the affiliation of totemism or totemistic cults to the Hindu doctrine of Incarnation.

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[77] For a criticism of the conception see O. C. Quick: *Modern Philosophy and The Incarnation*, p. 35, London, 1924.

On reflection we find that it is not easy to dismiss the theory of ten Incarnations as pure fancy: they include historical personalities, who were considered Incarnations, though the Dwarf and Man-lion were the forms God assumed directly without the mediation of human birth. King Bali prided himself on his vast wealth and proclaimed that he was prepared to give whatever was asked of him. God then descended before him in the form of a very small man. Bali in his usual manner asked the new mendicant what he wanted. The beggar asked for a tiny piece of land, on which to place his feet. Bali simply laughed at his folly and said that his desire would be fulfilled. Then the Dwarf covered the whole earth with one foot, the heavens with the other and projecting a third leg between the two asked Bali to give him land on which to put his third foot. Bali was dumbfounded; and so on. Kalki was an Incarnation yet to come in which God would indeed assume a human birth. As for the animal Incarnations, God assumed these forms for various cosmic purposes.

On the other hand, we cannot from this theory draw any consistent account of the evolution of man from the animal world. It is difficult to say that fish, tortoise, and boar represent distinct stages of evolution prior to that where man emerged. Nor can we say that the conception of man-lion suggests that the first man arose out of the lion. That would contradict the modern scientific theory of evolution.

However, the view that the theory of ten Incarnations is an attempt to assimilate the essentials of some cults into Hindu religion is tenable. It goes without saying that the Buddha was the founder of a new yogic order. Indeed Buddhism in its essence was absorbed into Hinduism when the Buddha was accepted as an Incarnation. It must be that fish, tortoise and boar were three distinct totems. But there is difficulty here as totemism was not one of the earliest forms of religion. There is here no need for us to go into detail about it. To say the least, totemism is the name for a peculiar kind of belief and of practices among some primitive tribes concerning their relation with various species of animals.[78]

We are told that in some savage societies a tribe has a totem, which is a species, not a single animal in isolation. Each animal of such a species has a close relation with each individual of the tribe in question. In short, the totem is held sacred and is treated with respect, even with reverence as it protects the tribe in question. In some rare cases totems are human. Now, though the theory that totemism was the earliest form of religion is exploded, yet totemism at first view gives one the impression that it is a religious cult. This then was probably why some time in the past an attempt was made to absorb the prevailing forms of totemism into the Hindu fold by means of the conception of ten Incarnations. But this is only a hypothesis. We cannot prove it. However, there is nothing absurd about the ten Incarnations as enumerated above. If we accept the idea that God occasionally assumes earthly forms for some action or purpose in the cosmos, there is no reason whatever why we should repudiate the idea that God in the past appeared in some chosen animal forms.

Whatever be the explanation of the conception of ten Incarnations, we find that the idea involves some ambiguity about the word "Avatara". As we find, in the theory "Avatara" is taken in two senses at the same time, although the word has the general meaning of descent of the Divine. The question is then whether any descent of God is an Incarnation. This is the most vital point. In the *Bhāgavata* mention is made of more than twenty Incarnations, in one context twenty-three and as many as twenty-seven in another.[79] In the account given therein we find much the same confusion as about the conception of ten Incarnations.

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[78] *Vide* the article on Totemism by W. E. Armstrong in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 14th edition, Vol. XXII.

As it is described in the *Bhāgavata,* God the supreme Being for the purpose of creation assumed in the beginning the form of a great Person with a triune body. One was extremely subtle, another was all-pervading, and a third was of non-empirical stuff. Out of the navel of the Person then arose Brahmā, the Creator of the world. This Person that God originally became was the ultimate source of all Incarnations. Elsewhere in the *Bhāgavata*[80] the Incarnations are enumerated thus: Kumār, Barāha (Boar), Nārada, Nara, Nārāyana, Kapila, Dattātreya, Yajna, Rishava, Prithu, Matsya (Fish), Kurma (Tortoise), Dhanvantari, Mohini, Nri-Singha (Man-lion), Bāmana (the Dwarf), Parasurām, Vyāsa, Rāma, Sri Krisṇa, Balarām, Buddha, and Kalki. In yet another context the Incarnations are as follows: Barāha (Boar), Suyajna, Kapila, Dattātreya, Sanatkumar, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanātana, Nara, Nārāyana, Prithu, Rishava, Hayagriba, Matsya (Fish), Kurma (Tortoise), Nri-Singha (Man-lion), Hari, Bāmana (the Dwarf), Hansa, Manvantara, Dhanvantari, Parasurām, Rāma, Sri Krisṇa, Vyāsa, Buddha, and Kalki.[81] In both accounts some of the Incarnations are forms God assumed directly and the rest were mediated by birth on earth. The number as enumerated above is, however, not exhaustive, for it is clearly set forth in the *Bhāgavata* that God's Incarnations are infinite in number.[82] We cannot, in any case, account for the ambiguity involved in the conception of Incarnation in the *Bhāgavata.*

Sri Krisṇa in the *Bhagavadgītā* makes the whole thing abundantly clear, analyzing it in terms of divine birth on earth. As he puts it, whenever there is a crisis in the moral and spiritual life of mankind, God descends on earth in a human form through a human birth. Sri Krisṇa also mentions, as we have seen before, that He had previously many births. About this conception there is no confusion. Indeed there might be forms God assumed for some purpose without having recourse to birth, human or other. But these would be more or less spiritual forms which should be kept apart from those strictly called Incarnations. It is, however, to be noted that, according to both lists of Incarnations given above, God sometimes appeared in two forms or incarnated Himself as two individuals at the same time. Balarām and Krisṇa, for example, were double Incarnations. About this conception of a double Incarnation we must keep an open mind.

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[79] I, chap. iii ; also II, chap. vii.
[80] I, iii.
[81] II, vii.
[82] I, iii, 26.

The theory of Incarnation in the school of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism is based on the *Bhāgavata,* though an attempt is made to make it self-consistent. According to this school, there is a distinction between the eternal form of God as in Himself and the forms in which He appears.[83] The eternal form of God consists of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss absolute and is the fountainhead of all other forms and also of all Incarnations.

The hypostatic manifestations are the purely spiritual forms of God, such as Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Saṁkarṣaṇa, and so forth. What is called a mere appearance or *āvesha* of God is the form in which He possesses temporarily the self of a saint or prophet thereby lifting him up spiritually or communicating His word through him to the world.[84] Such possession is exemplified especially in the Vedic sages and some Old Testament prophets. However, Incarnations are the forms God assumes by birth on the earthly plane, such as Rāma, Krisṇa, and Jesus Christ. But the Vaiṣṇavas of the Bengal school support the orthodox Bhāgavata doctrine that Sri Krisṇa is God Himself, and that all other Incarnations are only partial descent by Him.[85] We do not understand what is meant by this conception, although they say that in one and only in one form God descends in the plenitude of His being and nature.

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[83] S. K. Dey: *History of Early Vaiṣṇava Theology*, p. 182-184, Calcutta, 1942.

[84] Sanātana Goswami: *Brihadbhāgavatāmritam,* ed. by Puridas, Dacca, 1352 B.S., II, iv, 167.

[85] *Op. cit.,* II, iv, 185-186 ; also *Bhāgavata,* I, iii, 28.

We are told that Sri Kriṣṇa was not a part of God, but God Himself. Now, then, if an Incarnation is a partial descent of God, Sri Kriṣṇa is no Incarnation. Again, if He is an Incarnation, the latter is God Himself in flesh. There is, then, only one Incarnation in the strict sense, Sri Kriṣṇa. The position that He is God Himself, while all other Incarnations represent only a partial descent of God, is obviously the Indian counterpart of the Christian doctrine that Jesus is the only Incarnation of God in the sense of the revelation of God and the only way for mankind. It is surprising that the words of Sri Kriṣṇa Himself do not weigh with His votaries. He says expressly in the *Bhagavadgītā* that He takes birth again and again in an earthly form to save mankind. Clearly He means that each Incarnation represents the descent of God Himself. The overzeal for Sri Kriṣṇa as an Incarnation evidently inspired in the Bhāgavatas at a certain stage of their religion a sort of sectarianism, which overturned the whole conception of Incarnation so clearly set forth in the *Bhagavadgītā*.

At all events, the conception of Incarnation as a partial descent of God merges into the idea of what is called a *Bivūti* or special manifestation of God. But in the *Bhagavadgītā* itself these two ideas are kept distinct. A whole chapter is devoted to the topic of *Bivūti,* a word which is taken differently in different texts. In one place it means the supernatural powers which a yogi acquires in the course of his spiritual development. For instance, there is a section in the *Pātañjala Yoga-Sūtra,* which deals with the yogic processes which develop different extraordinary powers called *Bivūtis*. But the question is whether in the *Bhagavadgītā* we can take *"Bivūti"* to mean extraordinary powers or divine attributes.[86] We, however, prefer Radhakrishnan's translation of the word as divine manifestation.[87] We may even say that by it Sri Kriṣṇa means special manifestations of God.

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[86] Swami Swarupananda: *Bhagavad-Gita,* pp. 228-229.

[87] *Bhagavadgītā,* p. 261.

As the *Gītā* shows, God manifests Himself in multitudinous forms in the universe displaying thereby the divine powers through which God manifests. To take "*Bivūti*" as meaning the latter is to put the cart before the horse. Anyway, if God manifests Himself in the world, He does not keep Himself completely hidden there. Indeed the empirical existence conceals the supreme Being. There are nevertheless openings in the veil, and these are the special manifestations of God, which Sri Krișṇa calls the *Bivūtis* of the Lord. His special manifestations are in fact countless. As Sri Krișṇa points out, the best in every kind of things and in every class of beings are God's special manifestations ; such as Vișṇu among the Ādityas, Marichi among the winds, the Sāma Veda among the Vedas, Indra among the gods, and so on.

Sri Krișṇa sums up by saying "Whatever being is there endowed with glory and grace and vigour, know that to have sprung from a fragment of My splendour".[88] Whatever things and beings exhibit extraordinary strength, power, vigour, grace, beauty and prosperity are expressions of the splendour of the Deity. So the special manifestations themselves partially reveal the supreme Being seated in the heart of the universe. Though in Creation God manifests Himself, generally speaking, under cover of ignorance, yet a modicum of the divine power goes out into the manifestations, and appears in different ways and in special forms. There is therefore much even in the visible world that testifies to the divine presence there.

The vision of the Divine in His special manifestations was perhaps the beginning of man's God-consciousness and marks the point from which an aspirant is to start upon his spiritual career. As Sri Aurobindo puts it, "Henceforward that vision would be the starting-point of all inward and outward operations of his consciousness ; it would be the fundamental seeing, the spiritual basis of all his actions."[89]

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[88] *Op. cit.*, p. 268.
[89] *Essays on the Gita*, Second Series, p. 159, Calcutta, 1928.

Now it ought to be clear that if we take an Incarnation as a partial descent of God, it would simply be a phenomenon among those which partially reveal the Divine, and the only difference between an Incarnation and special manifestations would be that it is marked by some powers and attributes revealed nowhere else. In that case an Incarnation as a unique spiritual phenomenon in the sense of descent of God with His full divine consciousness loses all significance.

It is no use arguing that Sri Krişņa speaks of Bāsudeva, Himself, as a *Bivūti,* showing that Incarnation and *Bivūti* are allied conceptions. But, then, we cannot fail to see that Sri Krişņa also considers Arjuna as a special manifestation among the Pāndavas. Obviously Arjuna is not an Incarnation in the sense expounded in the *Gītā.*[90] If Bāsudeva is mentioned as a special manifestation, He is to be only so considered when He is taken as an individual among those who belonged to the Vrişņi clan. Clearly, then, it is wrong to call an Incarnation a partial descent of God. Sri Krişņa is, however, regarded as God Himself, and as He is counted among Incarnations, the meaning of the word "Incarnation" is clear enough. It means the descent of God to the earthly plane through a human birth. And, if so-called other Incarnations represent a partial descent of God, we are led on to the view that there is only one Incarnation worth the name, Sri Krişņa. But this view is rather extreme and is not warranted by the teaching of the *Gītā.*

The last point to be considered is what Incarnation means to man. An Incarnation, as we have seen, is born with a mission which is to establish the Kingdom of righteousness, to help the seekers of Truth and Light forward and to subdue the forces of evil. Every Incarnation therefore holds the Truth before mankind, formulates it in clear terms and shows the way to follow in life. He, in short, gives the *Dharma,* the Law to regulate life both inner and outer.

A law as such is that which holds men together and determines their mutual relationship. This implies that they can live and thrive in the socio-political whole which together they form. So when an Incarnation comes, He shows in a general way how to rebuild society and the State on the principles of love, justice, purity and righteousness. He reorients human traditions and institutions in order to help mankind to adjust themselves to their milieu. But this is only an outer action which is determined by an inner urge.[91]

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[90] *Essays on the Gita,* First Series, p. 234, Calcutta, 1926.

An Incarnation is not merely a social reformer or a political leader. Social reformers and political leaders are there. Every country and age has them and they are God's *Bivūtis* or special manifestations. Indeed through them God works under cover of ignorance, though partly revealing Himself in the world. Now, if God incarnates Himself, He comes mainly as the spiritual guide to mankind. He places before men the ultimate end of life by assuming human form and human nature. He thereby shows that the Divine is not far away, but is immanent in men. The divinity latent in humanity must be worked out. The birth and life of an Incarnation indicates that man is to rise into the Godhead revealed in the Incarnation. But it does not mean that man himself is to become an Incarnation, or, which is the same thing, God Himself.

In the Hindu fold itself there are some schools or sects that are given to Absolutism. The Advaitist (Vedāntic acosmist), for example, maintains that in the ultimate state of spiritual experience the aspirant becomes identical with the Absolute—the Impersonal and Indeterminate. It does not, however, mean that, the realization on the part of an aspirant being consummate, a new Absolute comes into being; there cannot be as many Absolutes as there are aspirants risen to the ultimate state. An aspirant becoming the Absolute means merely that he merges into the Absolute. As a river flows into the sea, so also the aspirant enters into the Infinite, if he does in fact enter there.

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[91] *Op. cit.*, pp. 214-215.

Sri Krişņa in the *Gītā* says that a man who has taken refuge in God absolutely and has purified his self of the lower impulses, such as passion, fear, anger, and hate, by penance and right knowledge, attains to His status or state of being.[92] This cannot be taken to mean that an aspirant is to rise to a state of identity with the Supreme. A mystic may experience oneness with God, but he does not become God. It is only a subjective experience based on the objective relation of partial identity in essence between God and finite spirits.

Sri Krişņa does not assert absolute identity between God and a human spirit in the state of perfection. In one context he says that a fraction of His Self has become individual souls eternal in nature.[93] So there is no question of a man becoming God. At the peak of spiritual progress when an aspirant attains to union with God, he comes to partake of God's being and power. Being poised in his spiritual nature he then becomes a tool in the hands of God, a channel of divine activities. This is the state of perfection, and is exemplified in the life and doings of an Incarnation. The ideal for man to achieve presents itself therein in a visible form.

After John the Baptist had been put in prison Jesus came to Galilee and began to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. "The time is fulfilled", He said, "and the kingdom of God is at hand."[94] This raised high hopes in His hearers who read into the saying their own ideas. But Jesus meant things far deeper than they could ever imagine. The Kingdom of God in this sense meant the supreme spiritual state which was all inward, so that one was in direct union with God. Thus Jesus said, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, lo here! or lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you."[95] Again, when Pilate asked Him to define this Kingdom, Jesus replied by saying "My kingdom of God is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence."[96]

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[92] *Bhagavadgītā,* IV, 10.
[93] *Op. cit.,* XV, 7.
[94] *Mark,* i, 15.
[95] *Luke,* xvii, 20.

Jesus as an ideal teacher attacked the mass mind in a direct way. He took over the slogan of the time, though He altered its meaning. Thus He gave a twist to popular phraseology and a higher perspective to the people of His time. While the Jews who heard him took "the kingdom of God" to mean an earthly kingdom to be established by God, Jesus took the phrase to mean the state of spiritual perfection. As He said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."[97] And this state of perfection was to be reached through love of God, which would purify the mind and make it fit for divine communion. Jesus emphasized this point and said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself".[98]

One is to love God with one's whole being, because God is the supreme Reality, the soul of our souls. Love of God is then the supreme good as it leads the devotee to unalloyed infinite bliss. But it is not easy of attainment. We have to clear our minds of all sordid ideas and selfishness and to purge our hearts of the clinging to worldly things and parochial love of near and dear ones. We have to shun the path of sensuous enjoyment and saturate our being with the sense of the highest value which is God, or better, love of God. All this Jesus summed up in the pithy sentence "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."[99]

It is now clear that the first commandment mentioned above posits the highest spiritual truth, and for that reason, the highest value for man. The Kingdom of God is the blissful state in which the spiritual aspirant plunges into the thought and love of God. All this, however, does not render the second commandment meaningless. By "thy neighbour" Jesus meant "thy fellow men" and by love of neighbour He meant just love of men and also the Kingdom of God in a secondary sense of a new World Order based on love, justice and fellow-feeling. But He never meant that love of God and love of men were on the same footing. Love of men is the adjunct of love of God, and is the means wherewith to attain the latter. We are, as Jesus pointed out, the children of God. So, if we really love Him, we cannot but love our fellow beings as well. If this be so, love of men would follow upon love of God as a matter of course. There need be no commandment about it. If Jesus ordered His hearers to love their neighbours, the commandment carried about it a suggestion of establishing a new Order of existence on the basis of love and equity, which was to be the appropriate medium for the realization of the ultimate end of human life—union with God.

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[96] *John*, xviii, 36.
[97] *Matthew*, v, 48.
[98] *Op. cit.*, xxii, 37-39.
[99] *Op. cit.*, vi, 24.

It is a truism to say that we remain selfish in too many ways, that our selfishness proves a barrier between us and our higher growth and begets evils of all sorts—envy, jealousy, hatred, exploitation, oppression, and so forth. And these in their turn lead to fissiparous activities on our part. Our inner being is thus disturbed, and in such a state no ennobling ideas can settle down in us. There is therefore need to cleanse our minds and hearts. Until this is done there can be no urge in us for God. Jesus pointed out that it was through love of men that one could make oneself fit for eventual love of God; "Blessed are the pure in heart", because love of God dawns only on a pure soul.

Sri Kriṣṇa in the *Gītā* emphasizes that society is an organic whole and seeks to ensure its stability and integrity. It is a plain fact that we are all born to society in which we live, move and grow. Society is the living embodiment of human tradition which with its manifold phases comes about as the cumulative effect of the experiences of the past generations. So it has to be maintained, and nothing should be allowed to disrupt it. Arjuna being a leading citizen of his time, Sri Krișṇa brings home to him the fact that if he does not discharge the duties proper to his station in life others would follow his example and thus bring about social chaos. So, as Sri Krișṇa urges, even if one has already attained perfection and has no personal end in view, one must continue to work disinterestedly and dispassionately just to preserve order in society.[100]

As to the attitude of the person blessed with God-realization it is said in the *Gītā* that his heart pours out in sympathy and compassion to all irrespective of caste, creed, colour and nationality; his love extends even beyond the human level.[101]

Society is never perfect, but has come to its present stage by a gradual development, aided by occasional upheavals wrought by men of genius and also by the intervention of God in the form of an Incarnation from time to time. It can only be reformed for the best in the light of the highest interest of man. An Incarnation comes to teach mankind that the ultimate end of human life is spiritual, and to show them how to grow to perfection. Thus every Incarnation says that *He is the way and the truth.* His life exhibits the pattern which is to be worked out in our life. An Incarnation therefore presents in the texture of His being three elements, namely the word, the end, and the way. Those who understand Him get together with the urge to realize the highest end common to all men, and evolve in due course an organization to this end.

These three elements are emphasized in some organized religions, especially in those which are founded upon the teachings of divine personalities. Thus Christianity links together the Bible, Christ and the Church; Buddhism emphasizes the Dharma, the Buddha, and the Sangha; and Vaișṇavism takes the *Bhāgavata* (the word of God), Bhagavān (God), and the Bhakta (devotee) as forming one compact whole. These three sets of words, apparently different, mean much the same things. Indeed when an Incarnation comes the floodgates of spirituality are opened upon the world, and there is an upheaval in culture. But this does not continue for long. With the passage of time the tide ebbs and men's spiritual vision again becomes blurred. People again begin to confuse religion with irreligion, virtue with vice, truth with falsehood. Even the organizations that arose out of the teachings of some past Incarnations become the breeding ground of corruptions. When at last all this works up to a spiritual crisis there arises a need for visibly direct divine intervention. But it is not for men steeped in ignorance to see when such a crisis threatens them and far less to know when God comes down. However, blessed are those who keep vigil, who see and recognize Him when He has actually come again on earth in a human form.

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[100] *Bhagavadgītā,* III, 20.
[101] *Op. cit.,* XVI, 2.

CHAPTER II

THE PRECURSORS OF RAMAKRISHNA

Before we launch upon the life and teaching of Ramakrishna it is well to consider the conditions of India in the first half of the nineteenth century, in which he was born. British rule was well established in Bengal and in some other parts of India and brought order out of the political chaos that prevailed in the country at that time. More important still it led to an effectual contact between Eastern and Western culture through the Christian Faith. In short, there was a ferment of new thought in the country: Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, and other ideas mingled together and made for a national regeneration. This happened first on the religious plane.[1]

Ram Mohan Roy was the pioneer of the nationalist movement. This great Indian is worthy of our consideration because of his unique contribution to the regeneration of his fallen countrymen and of his eventful life which throws a flood of light upon the religious, social and political conditions of India, especially of Bengal at that time. It is worth while to consider his career in some detail.

Ram Mohan Roy was born of an aristocratic Brahmin family in 1774 at Radhanagar in Hooghly.[2] His father Ram Kanta Roy gave him a sound education bringing him up in orthodox Hindu ideas and beliefs. Even when a boy Ram Mohan showed remarkable intelligence and possessed a prodigious memory. His education in Bengali being completed at home, he was sent to learn Persian and Arabic in Patna. There he was gradually initiated into Persian poetry, Muslim philosophy, Sufic mysticism, and something of Greek thought through Arabic translations.[3] He was later sent at his mother's desire to Banaras for Sanskrit learning.

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[1] K. T. Paul: *British Connection with India*, p. 39, London, 1927.

[2] Miss Collet has put May 22, 1772 as the date of his birth.

We are told that by this time Ram Mohan became rather sceptical of the prevailing forms of Hindu worship which was for the most part idolatrous. And his scepticism was a prelude to his career as a religious leader and reformer. His differences with his orthodox father on the score of the latter supporting idolatry were for a time a source of family trouble, which however did not last for long. In the mean time, however, Ram Mohan left home in quest of truth. Earlier, we are told, he wanted to renounce the world and become a sannyasin.[4] But he was persuaded to abandon this idea. It shows that he had a religious bent of mind and was eager to reach truth beyond the formalism of rites and rituals.

This inner urge for truth goaded Ram Mohan Roy to undertake a hazardous journey over the Himalayas to Tibet in order to study the Buddhist forms of worship as practised by the Lamas. He stayed there for a few years. But before long he grew critical of the Lamas and aroused their opposition. He returned to India to study Sanskrit in all its aspects at Banaras where he remained for ten years until the death of his father in 1803.[5]

Ram Mohan when he was only nine years old had been married to two child wives, and his eldest son was born in 1800 when he was about twenty-eight years old. On the death of his father, which was a turning point in his life, he entered the Bengal Civil Service and rose to be Dewan or Head Revenue Officer. During this period he published in Persian with an Arabic preface a small treatise entitled *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhiddin* (A Gift to Monotheists) which is now available in English translation. The work of an original, powerful mind, it summarizes his ideas on religion and religious practices, which were as follows. In people we must distinguish between their nature as rational beings and the effects on them of their habits, of their mutual intercourse. The distinction between these two kinds of elements that enter into the personality of a man furnishes the criterion for separating true from false religious beliefs. Though every man has the light of reason, yet he generally imbibes ideas from outside without criticism. He follows blindly his religious leader without criticism. He follows blindly his religious leader without pausing to see whether his master himself lives up to the ideas that he preaches, or whether the ideas or beliefs themselves are free from absurdity. Anyone who becomes inquisitive and inquires into his faith is looked upon as a heretic and dismissed as an evil spirit.

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[3] Sophia Dobson Collet: *Life and Letters of Raja Ram Mohun Roy*, p. 3, Calcutta, 1913.

[4] *Op. cit*, p. 3.

[5] *The English Works of Raja Ram Mohun Roy*, p. ix. Allahabad, 1906; also Collet, p. 5.

In childhood and adolescence one's critical power remains undeveloped. One has, then, the tendency to accept without question or criticism whatever ideas come from one's superiors and surroundings. These ideas, beliefs and creeds then get so firmly lodged in one's mind that they rule one's whole life. In addition some people often become ambitious. In their zeal for religious leadership they invent fascinating stories and forge arguments in support of their particular creed. And the common run of men follow them without question. It is in this way that religion has been degraded. No wonder, then, that many people take stones, or trees, or animals as real objects of worship. Being intellectually blind, they become dogmatic to the point of defending their idols by the sacrifice of their own lives.

Each of us is a social being, born to society and brought up in the traditions of social life. But the fact remains that we are rational beings. So our social intercourse must be based on an intelligent understanding of our ideas and beliefs. There is in us the light of reason, to which we must all turn and of which we must all make good use. This is how we can know truth from falsehood. Each religion has its creeds and dogmas and inculcates a definite course of duties, which relates to the well-being of its votaries here and hereafter. Each again claims that it alone is true and that the followers of other supposedly false religions are eternally damned. Such being the situation, one religion cannot refute the claims and creeds of another without sowing the seeds of prejudice, animosity, and hatred.

Some believe in a just God with human attributes, such as anger, mercy, love and hatred, others that God pervades the whole universe, while a few are atheists. All these people confuse what is due to training and habit, and what is based on the nature of man as a rational being. If a person rids himself of the accretions that come to him through training, and turns to the light of reason, he will find that there is only one supreme Being worthy of worship, the Creator and Ordainer of the universe.

In some religions much is made of miracle as bearing witness to the play of supernatural or superhuman powers in the world. And the leaders of these religions themselves claim these powers in order to tighten their hold on their followers. The fact, however, is that some so-called miracles, such as raising the dead, rising bodily to Heaven, and so on, are manifestly absurd, while the rest are in line with ordinary natural phenomena. A phenomenon is usually considered miraculous when its cause remains undiscovered. The conception of miracle is, then, based on our inability to explain an event or a set of events and is, for that reason, quite irrelevant to religion.

Nowadays in India belief in the supernatural and miraculous has come to such a sorry state that we simply stagger at the colossal ignorance of the people. As Hafiz puts it, "The disputes of seventy-two sects (among Mohammedans) are to be excused, because they, not finding the truth, have trotted the way of fables or nonsense." The various founders of the different religions are long dead. How, then, can we say that they possessed superhuman powers? Their legends contradict one another and are thus outrageous to reason.

It is no use arguing that God communicated His guidance to men through prophets and other religious leaders in the past; there is no need for intermediaries. If there is such a need, there would be a series of prophets, with whom we would be left and would lose all connection with God. Hindus believe that the Veda is a revelation of the supreme Being, and they hold on to it even under the severest persecution. On the other hand, a text in the Koran, which is also claimed to have come from God, runs like this. "Kill the idolaters wherever you find them, ... capture the unbelievers in the holy war, then either set them free by way of obliging them or by taking ransom."[6] It is hardly surprising that the followers of this great religion "have not failed to do their utmost to kill and persecute the polytheists and unbelievers in the prophetic missions of the last of prophets." Certainly these contradictory precepts could not proceed from all-wise and all-merciful God. There is then only one alternative open to us, to reject them outright as being the blasphemous invention of an idle brain.

The original teachings of all religions are overburdened with meaningless additions by those who deceived the people to gain their selfish ends. From the religious point of view all mankind can be divided into four classes: first, the deceivers who in order to exercise their sway invent doctrines and creeds; second, the people who are misled and without a word of criticism follow others; third, those who mistakenly mislead others; fourth, the rest of mankind who through the grace of God are neither deceivers nor deceived. In the words of Hafiz, "Plan the injury of no being and do whatever you please." So clear your mind of prejudice and bigotry and seek for truth.

As is evidenced by the above-mentioned treatise, Ram Mohan Roy grasped that there was one supreme Being who created and ordained the universe. According to him, the conception and worship of one God were common to all religions, and were taught by their founders. It was all a simple thing. But the superstructures that were later raised upon the teachings of the early leaders comprised superstitions, local customs and erroneous ideas.

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[6] *Qur-ān*, chap. IX, verses 28-29; chap. II, verses 190-191, tr. by Muhammed Ali, Lahore, 1916.

Ram Mohan started to learn English at the age of twenty-two in 1796,[7] and it took him several years to acquire ease with the language. The clarification of his mind as to the ultimate object of religion was effected through his study of the Koran, Muslim literature and philosophy and also the Hindu scriptures, primarily the Veda and Upaniṣads.

Ram Mohan wrote another treatise on religion called *The Discussions on various religions.* It has been lost, but in it, we are told, he made bitter observations about the religions. At all events, his revolutionary ideas raised a storm of opposition so that orthodox Hindus and Moslems threatened him with persecution. Being in the employ of the East India Company he was required to work in some outlying district of Bengal. Now for his personal safety he returned to Calcutta and settled down there. But he never abandoned his enterprise. He continued his labour to lead his countrymen out of prejudices and superstitions to truth. But orthodoxy was so rampant in the country that his relatives turned against him and his mother tried to disinherit him. In the year 1814 Ram Mohan was in his prime; he was then about forty years of age. His was a stately figure, nearly six feet in height, with penetrating eyes and a dignified bearing. He now plunged into his many-sided activities and became a pioneer in many fields.

During his residence at Rangpur as Revenue Officer he and his friends would meet for religious discussion. He set up a small society called *Ātmiya Sabhā* (Friendly Association) in which weekly classes were held on the Hindu scriptures and prayers to one God. The conviction dawned upon him that the Hindus could only be cured of their gross idolatry if they could be made to grasp the truth embodied in their scriptures. Accordingly he translated some of the major Upaniṣads and the Vedānta Sūtras into Bengali, Hindustani and later into English. He argued there was no trace of image-worship in the Veda or the Upaniṣads. He exhorted his Hindu brethren to give up idolatry and practise the Vedic religion of one God.

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[7] Collet: *Life and Letters of Raja Ram Mohun Roy,* p. 10.

In his famous preface to the translation of the *Iśa Upaniṣad* Ram Mohan made a forceful defence of his position. He quoted chapter and verse from the scriptures—the Veda, Purāṇa, Tantra, etc. to show that they all emphasized the unity of God who had attributes, though no body or form. It was no use arguing that the worship of gods and goddesses was prescribed only for those who could not grasp the Infinite. Ram Mohan showed that the Hindus of his time had no idea that in worshipping the countless gods and goddesses they worshipped only the attributes of one infinite invisible God. He meant that the Hindus in their ignorance had sunk into rank polytheism.

There were many sects with their respective deities whose followers gave them particular places of habitation and modes of existence. The devotees of Śiva, for instance, believed that the god with his wife and children lived much like a man on Mount Kailasa, while the followers of Viṣṇu thought that He was the Lord of all gods and goddesses, and lived with His wife in the highest heaven, and so on. Worst of all, when devotees belonging to the different sects met together at religious festivals each would claim superiority for his own deity and was prepared to fight for his beliefs.[8] None of them regarded the images they worshipped as instruments, but as gods.

It is clear that the symbolism which was instituted in the Purāṇic age to help the masses to rise gradually to higher spiritual realization lost its main purpose and lapsed into the worship of bits of matter—stone, wood, and so forth. Ram Mohan, therefore, sought to hold before the Hindus the fundamental truth enshrined in the Veda and Upaniṣads—that there was only one Being infinite and eternal to be worshipped. That was pure worship and pure religion free from the superstitious accretions of the ages.

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[8] *English Works*, p. 67.

The religion of one God did not mean pantheism. If one God created and pervaded the universe, it meant that every thing and creature depends upon, without being, God. One might argue that image-worship was the proper means of purifying the mind as the prerequisite for acquiring knowledge of God. Ram Mohan repudiated this, saying that no amount of superstitious practice could ever lead to the intended purification. Quoting from the *Brihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* he said, "Adore God alone. Nothing except the supreme Being should be adored by wise men. God alone rules the mind and relieves it from impurity."

The argument that image-worship was a time-honoured custom could not find favour with Ram Mohan. He averred that there was a clear distinction between divine faith and custom, that whereas the former was based on spiritual authorities and correct reasoning, the latter was the "fruit of vulgar caprice". He further pointed out that customs were changed every twenty years and so were not eternal. Since the middle of the eighteenth century most Hindus abandoned the ancient modes of performing their rites and rituals to follow the guidance of Raghunandan, the law-maker. The system of divisions and sub-divisions in each caste with their modes of marriage was a modern innovation contrary to the ancient law and customs, while the instruction of Europeans in the Veda, Smriti, and Purāṇa was a breach of an orthodox Hindu custom.

Ram Mohan continued in this strain and sought to bring home to the minds of his countrymen that their religious leaders, the priests, for personal ends held back the scriptures from them and exploited their ignorance. He appealed to the good sense of the people to abandon arid idol-worship. In order to awaken them from their intellectual slumber and to quicken their spiritual sense he took upon himself the arduous task of translating the major scriptural texts. He picked the plain spiritual truths out of the difficult Sanskrit language and put them in an accessible form before common men. It was a noble task which nobody before Ram Mohan had attempted. On the basis of the Veda and Upaniṣads he propounded the religion of one God and formulated an appropriate form of worship. He laid emphasis on the sacred syllable "Om" and on the Gāyatrī which formed part of the daily prayer of of a Brahmin. He upheld the doctrine of one infinite Being and insisted on prayer as the purest form of worship.[9]

But Ram Mohan soon found himself in the thick of a controversy in which pundits all over the country joined issue with him. He had to write one treatise after another in defence of his monotheistic religion and proved equal to his opponents. He was obviously on vantage ground from which it was difficult to dislodge him. Disgusted with sectarianism, religious feuds and fanaticism he went back to the fundamental fact upon which religion as such was grounded —the unity of God. He further strengthened his position by a searching analysis of scriptural texts on which he sought to establish a universal religion which would make for amity and harmony among men. He framed clear instructions for the guidance of the followers of the universal religion as follows:

Religion is not merely belief, but also worship which means contemplation of the attributes of the supreme Being who is the Author and Governor of the universe. But God cannot be defined in clear terms. As the scriptures declare, He is beyond the intellect, mind and speech. To the worship of God, the supreme Being, no one can be opposed. The followers of the different religions and sects all believe that the object of their worship is the Author and Ordainer of the world. If it is written that God is invisible and undefinable, all that is meant is that He cannot be likened to any worldly thing or being. It is not, however, that He is absolutely unknown. The nature and constitution of the universe demonstrate His existence as the Creator. As by the action of the body we posit a spirit, so by the phenomena of Nature we conceive a World-Creator.

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[9] *Op. cit.*, pp. 81-86.

It does not matter whomsoever or whatsoever one worships so long as one considers the object of worship as the supreme Being. But it does not mean that there is no difference between the followers of the universal religion and those of other religions, particularly idolaters. The former differ from the rest in two ways: first, idolaters and others worship under various forms and in definite places, while the votaries of the universal religion do not confine their worship to any particular form or place; secondly, those who worship under any particular form are hostile to others who do so under another guise.

The universal religion was not opposed to other creeds. In it the authority of the scriptures must be reinforced by reason. The study of scriptural texts is an aid to spiritual life. One should promote one's good and also that of others, while what one considers injurious to oneself must be avoided as being harmful to others also. As the body is the basis of our being, it is necessary to eat and act in accordance with the laws prescribed in the scriptures. The regulation of food and drink is also desirable from the point of view of prudence. If people go their own way in these matters they soon develop different habits which clash with those of their neighbours. Further, as regards the selection of food, if we are to fall back upon ourselves absolutely much of our time and energy would be spent on experimenting with different kinds of edibles. It is therefore preferable to follow our forefathers who laid down feasible rules about food. Moreover for worship a suitable place is needed, though it is not absolutely necessary. The main thing is for the mind to be at rest. That place and that time is proper where and when the mind is completely quiet. The form of worship in the universal religion is open to all.[10]

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[10] *The Universal Religion*: *English Works*, pp. 135-138.

If Ram Mohan was engaged in reforming Hindu religion, it was because of his conviction that all evils in contemporary society arose from erroneous religious beliefs and practices. The most outrageous social evil in his time was the rite of *Suttee,* which originally meant *Sati,* a faithful chaste wife. But unfortunately it came later to mean the self-immolation of a chaste wife on the funeral pyre of her husband.

In the eighteenth and the first quarter of the nineteenth century *Suttee* in the latter sense was much in vogue. Widows burned themselves as an act of piety with their dead husbands, often being forced by their relatives to jump into the blazing pyres. There is no doubt that chastity is a treasure in women, who in India preserved it by all means.

It is a commonplace of history how Rajput women performed the *Jahar-brata*—self-immolation in the sacred fire for fear of molestation by the invaders of their land. They preferred death to losing their purity. However, a woman in her passionate love walking into the funeral fire of her husband displays a far higher ideal. Similar conjugal love is not rare even today, when separation from the beloved being unbearable, the wife kills herself to be united in spirit with her dead husband, and *vice versa.* This is a personal matter, and we cannot say whether it is right or wrong. But obviously it cannot be universalized. Such a sacrifice on the part of the wife or the husband cannot be made a social custom.

Strangely enough, the rite of *Suttee* in the degenerate Hindu society was based on such a demonstration of ideal conjugal love. Whatever the origin of the rite, it was there in its horrible form. There was nothing more savage than the scene of an unfortunate widow being tied with bamboo and rope to ensure against her escape and literally dragged against her will on to the funeral pile of her husband.

In 1811 Ram Mohan's eldest brother Jagan Mohan died, and his widow became a *Suttee.* He did his utmost to dissuade her from taking the terrible step. But it was to no purpose. When, however, she was actually caught by the flames, she jumped up in her attempt to escape. But it was not to be, her pious relatives kept her down with bamboo poles until she died. Drums and other sonorous instruments were sounded to drown her shrieks of agony. Ram Mohan was there, but was helpless. Filled with pity and indignation, he resolved then and there that he would know no rest until that barbarous custom was abolished. He began to agitate and rouse the conscience of the people against the evil practice. He started writing tracts in Bengali for and against *Suttee* in the form of a catechism. The main points were as follows:

There is no point in saying that *Suttee* was enjoined by the scriptures as it is a modern custom, not being mentioned in the Veda or the Upaniṣads. There are, of course, many texts of inferior authority which deal with the question. But they are not all agreed about it. Some prescribe it, while others propose alternatives. Some again expressly say that after the death of the husband the wife must live the life of an ascetic. It is obvious, then, that *Suttee* is a matter over which opinion varies. And, if this be so, the practice loses all authority. All this is corroborated by the fact that it is not co-extensive with Hinduism, being prevalent only in Bengal and some parts of Hindusthan.

It is preposterous to say that people burn widows, because the latter, if allowed to survive, would live a life of disgrace and thus bring a slur on their families. If this were so, we are appalled at the moral degradation of the people. If widows are led to an evil way of life the responsibility rests on men. It is also clear that the social organization is defective, in the sense that there is no machinery moral, social or political to guarantee the protection of the widows. Why burn them only? You should hunt out all prospective moral delinquents and treat them likewise. The practice of *Suttee* has in fact dehumanized people, who, when they see a widow burning, become insensate. Women in general are indeed inferior to men in physical strength. But it is a prejudice to say that they are so in intellectual power and moral sense. Men taking advantage of their bodily strength denied to women the opportunities of developing their inner capacities.

In the glorious past of India women enjoyed equal rights with men and were prominent in many fields of human activities. Līlāvatī, wife of the Prince of Karnat, and Bhānumatī, wife of Kālidāsa the poet, were among the celebrities of their time. Maitreyī, who was married to the sage Yājñavalkya, was well fitted for spiritual life and received divine knowledge from her illustrious husband ; and so on. Further we can get insight into the moral character of both sexes in relation to each other if we consider the prevailing customs and forms of marriage. A woman may marry only once, while a man may do so two, three or even ten times or more.

A Brahmin generally marries a large number of women for the sake of money. He then leaves most of them with their parents, only visiting them occasionally to collect money from them. How degraded? The Brahmins talk glibly of God and often quote from the scriptures, but in practice they worship mammon. On the other hand, those women who live with their husbands enjoy a life of dedication. They do their utmost to make their in-laws happy. They do all domestic duties including cooking and serving meals in their families. And, if they are poor, they even draw water, prepare cow-dung for the fire, and so forth. So ungrateful are the men to their womenfolk that when the latter are widowed, they consider it a great religious act to burn them on pyres.

At first the attitude of the British administrators to *Suttee* was one of non-interference as it was claimed to be a religious rite. But gradually the conscience of the judges of the Nizamat Adalat, the chief law court in India at that time, came to be stirred. Some of them pronounced against the inhuman practice, but they had no power to interfere. Occasionally they sought sanction to do so from the head of the State, but without success. There was much hesitation among the chief British administrators about this matter as they placed security before everything else, and wished to avoid all risk of revolution.

However, Ram Mohan's reform movement gathered momentum, showing that the Hindu scriptures had nothing to do with *Suttee* and that there was nothing religious about it. Consequently the British Government decided gradually to control the evil practice. Ram Mohan advocated the method of persuasion, which for the most part proved fruitful. There was now a body of opinion against *Suttee,* but nobody would take the final step. At last the most humane Lord William Bentinck succeeded Lord Amherst as Governor-General. He was a man of firm determination and resolute character. After hearing the judges and consulting the Army Officers the majority of whom were in favour of the abolition Lord Bentinck became certain of where his duty lay.

Ram Mohan however was not prepared to go so far. He "positively endeavoured to dissuade Lord Bentinck from the the drastic project".[11] The latter was resolved and with one stroke put down the savage rite. On the 4th of December, 1829, he issued the regulation which declared that the rite of *Suttee* was illegal and punishable as a criminal offence.

Ram Mohan had played a worthy part. He had proved to the hilt that *Suttee* was not a religious duty and that there was no sanction for it in the scriptures. This clarified the situation and emboldened Lord Bentinck to perform his noble task, but it provoked a counter movement. The orthodox section of the people raised the cry that their religion was in danger. So ignorant and depraved were they that they petitioned the Governor-General. Not succeeding they went to the length of appealing to the British Parliament. But Ram Mohan's genius prevailed against them. The abolition of *Suttee* became a *fait accompli.*

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[11] Collet: p. 99.

Ram Mohan then turned his attention elsewhere. He was convinced that the Hindus could get rid of their superstitious beliefs and cramping customs if they received proper education. He had to think out a system of education best suited to the people. There was at that time a controversy as to whether Sanskrit and Persian learning should be encouraged or Western ideas introduced. The Government, nervous in dealing with the natives, seemed to sponsor classical learning, presumably to placate the most orthodox elements of the population.

In 1821 Ram Mohan started a weekly newspaper for the common people in Bengali and in English called "The *Sambad Kaumudi*" (The Moon of Intelligence). The next year he brought out a Persian weekly under the title "The *Mirat-al-Akbar*" (The Mirror of Intelligence) to enlighten the learned. While it came out on Fridays, the former appeared on Tuesdays. All this was something quite new as far as the natives were concerned.

Ram Mohan was a pioneer in Indian journalism. In and through his papers he carried on his campaign against the follies of the people. He had the courage even to castigate the British for the policy they pursued in India and Europe, and gave wide publicity to all cases of insolence by British officials towards Indians. But after some time the Press Regulations were tightened up and the free expression of opinion was smothered. At this Ram Mohan was exasperated and wrote a reasoned defence of the liberty of the Press, which was the *Areopagitica* of Indian history.

Ram Mohan was all for English education, though he attached much importance to classical learning. He had his share with Sir E. H. East and David Hare in founding the Hindu College. Then in 1822 on his own initiative he opened an Anglo-Indian school for imparting free education to Hindu boys in English. And he soon found himself involved in a great educational controversy. The orientalists including some prominent Europeans pleaded for the exclusive pursuit of oriental culture. The Government itself was inclined to this view as it was considering the establishment of a Sanskrit College in Calcutta. That was too much for Ram Mohan. In his indignation he sent to Lord Amherst a letter on English education, from which we will quote a few sentences.

"We find that the Government are establishing a Sanskrit school under Hindu Pandits to impart such knowledge as is already current in India. This seminary (similar in character to those which existed in Europe before the time of Lord Bacon) can only be expected to load the minds of youth with grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinctions of little or no practical use to the possessors or to society. The pupils will there acquire what was known two thousand years ago with the addition of vain and empty subtleties since then produced by speculative men, such as is commonly taught in all parts of India.

"The Sanskrit language, so difficult that almost a lifetime is necessary for its acquisition, is well known to have been for ages a lamentable check to the diffusion of knowledge, and the learning concealed under this almost impervious veil is far from sufficient to reward the labour of acquiring it. But if it were thought necessary to perpetuate this language for the sake of the portion of valuable information it contains, this might be much more easily accomplished by other means than the establishment of a new Sanskrit College. . . . .

"I beg leave to state with due deference to your Lordship's exalted situation that if the plan now adopted be followed, it will completely defeat the object proposed, since no improvement can be expected from inducing young men to consume a dozen years of the most valuable period of their lives in acquiring the niceties of vyakaran or Sanskrit grammar.

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"I beg your Lordship will be pleased to compare the state of science and literature in Europe before the time of

Lord Bacon with the progress of knowledge made since he wrote.

"If it had been intended to keep the British nation in ignorance of real knowledge, the Baconian philosophy would not have been allowed to displace the system of the schoolmen which was the best calculated to perpetuate ignorance. In the same manner the Sanskrit system of education would be the best calculated to keep the country in darkness; if such had been the policy of the British legislature. But as the improvement of the native population is the object of the Government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of education, embracing Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy, with other useful sciences, which may be accomplished with the sums proposed by employing a few gentlemen of talent and learning educated in Europe and providing a College furnished with necessary books, instruments, and other apparatus."[12]

The above excerpts are an expression of a master mind. Although a great lover of India's spiritual lores, Ram Mohan perceived that the system of Sanskrit education, then in vogue, could turn out only pundits who would parrotlike repeat what they learnt. That would not train young men to think. They could not develop their minds and see through the mass of superstitions and prejudices that had gathered around them. Further exclusive Sanskrit education was an anachronism in the nineteenth century. Ram Mohan insisted on a scientific English education because he realized that the regeneration of the country depended on it. We all now know that his prophetic vision came true in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

In his educational campaign Ram Mohan was backed up by Christian missionaries whose motives were more evangelical than philanthropic. They wanted to introduce English education because they considered it the best conceivable instrument for transplanting Christianity on Indian soil. All this was clearly expressed in Dr. Duff's letters to Lord Auckland. In one of them he wrote rather bitterly against the orientalists.

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[12] *The English Works of Raja Ram Mohun Roy*, pp. 471-474.

"If palliatives there be, they may be summed up in a single sentence, *viz.*, that it was most kind and amiable to sooth the expiring sorrows of the superannuated remnant of the race of Orientalists, who, like the owls and the bats, have such a special affection for the dingy and the dismal edifices of hoary antiquity; and who, like the lovers of darkness, are ever ready to break forth into strains as doleful as the notes of a funeral dirge, when the crazy crevices in which they have so long nestled are threatened with extermination. But, beyond this admission, where are we to look for grounds of palliation?"[13] He continued: "In India the religion of Brahma is still a living religion, fraught with malignant energy and operating with undisputed sway on the understanding and the consciences of millions." I think by the phrase "the religion of Brahma" Dr. Duff referred to the Brāhmo religion founded by Ram Mohan, which we shall consider later. And Dr. Duff wrote these lines when Ram Mohan was no more on earth.

Ram Mohan helped Dr. Duff a good deal towards the fruition of his educational scheme. To start with he gave his friend a building where the latter started his school. He was present when Dr. Duff gave to each of the first pupils a copy of the Bible, and understood how the boys were obviously full of misgivings at the present. He reassured them, saying that there was no harm in reading the Bible and that he himself being a Hindu had read both it and the Koran.[14]

Ram Mohan being catholic in outlook could not quite grasp his friend's inner motive. Later, however, Dr. Duff indicated clearly what had prompted him to undertake educational work in India. He said, "Popular education ought therefore to be religious, that is to say, Christian ; for there is no such thing as religion in general ; in Europe and *in our day,* religion means Christianity ; let our popular schools, then, be Christian."[15] This is a typical statement ; through it Dr. Duff spoke out not only for himself, but for all orthodox Christians. It is beyond doubt that there is nothing like religion in general. But the claim that Christianity was the only religion worth the name was not founded on fact.

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[13] *Rev. Dr. Duff's Letters to Lord Auckland*, pp. 8-9, Calcutta, 1841.
[14] *Life and Letters of Raja Ram Mohun Roy*, pp. 110-111.

As a matter of fact, Christian missionaries in their proselytizing zeal began at this time to attack the tenets and doctrines of Hinduism. It seems that they sought to take advantage of Ram Mohan's destructive criticism of the priests. But they could not see that his attack was directed against the mass of superstitions that had accumulated upon Hinduism and that he only wanted to purify the religion of the Hindus. With him truth was the criterion.

Ram Mohan now took up the challenge of Christian orthodoxy. Several numbers of the *Brahmanical Magazine*[16] featured a wordy battle with the missionaries of Serampore, who replied through their own organ, the *Samachar Darpan.* In the preface to the first edition of the Magazine in 1821 Ram Mohan wrote: "For a period of upwards of fifty years, this country (Bengal) has been in the exclusive possession of the English nation ; during the first thirty years of which, from their word and deed, it was universally believed that they would not interfere with the religion of their subjects and that they truly wished every man to act in such matters according to the dictates of his own conscience. Their possessions in Hindoostan and their political strength have, through the grace of God, gradually increased. But during the last twenty years, a body of English gentlemen, who are called missionaries, have been publicly endeavouring in several ways to convert Hindoos and Mussalmans of this country to Christianity. The first way is that of publishing and distributing among the natives various books, large and small, reviling both religions, and abusing and ridiculing the gods and saints of the former: the second way is that of standing in front of the doors of the natives or in the public roads to preach the excellence of their own religion and the debasedness of that of others: the third way is that if any natives of low origin became Christians from their desire of gain or from any other motive, these gentlemen employ and maintain them as a necessary encouragement to others to follow their example."[17]

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[15] *Dr. Duff's Letters,* p. 53.

[16] *Cf.* Sivanath Sastri: *History of the Brahmo Samaj,* Vol. I, p. 44, Calcutta, 1911.

As Ram Mohan pointed out, the English were the sole masters of the land and the native people, poor, timid and humble, were frightened at the mere mention of the name of an Englishman. Such being the case, it was unfair that the missionaries who belonged to a stronger race should insult the weaker religion and culture. Ram Mohan was of opinion that for the past nine centuries or so the Hindus had suffered from such insults because of their "excess of civilization".[18]

It is not here possible to consider in detail the arguments Ram Mohan put forward to meet the criticism levelled against Hindu religion and scriptures. It is sufficient to say that he fought the missionaries with their own weapons. He showed that the charges they brought against Hinduism rebounded on them. Consistently with his position in regard to the Veda and Upaniṣads he told them that if they wanted to understand what Hinduism was like they must turn their attention from the superstitions and prejudices, which he himself was fighting, to the Hindu scriptures.

Ram Mohan's defence of Hindu religion anticipated that of Indian culture by Sri Aurobindo. He questioned central Christian doctrines, such as the Trinity, the Divinity of Christ, and the Resurrection. He rammed it in to the minds of his opponents that Christianity was as idolatrous as the Hinduism of his time. Christians, therefore, were not competent to criticize other religions. They called Jesus the Son of God, they looked upon Him as God and they said that God was one. But at the same time they maintained that the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost were each God. Yet there was only one God.

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[17] *The English Works of Raja Ram Mohun Roy*, p. 145.
[18] *Op. cit.*, p. 146.

All this appeared absurd to Ram Mohan the rationalist. He did not reject Christianity altogether, but found in it a religion of one God, which became a passion with him. Hence for a time he became attracted to Unitarian Christianity. But he never brought himself to accept the divinity of Christ, which he rejected with the Hindu doctrine of Incarnation. In reply to Dr. Tytler, who joined battle with him, he wrote: "It is unjust in the *Christian* to quarrel with Hindoos because (he says) they cannot comprehend the sublime mystery of his religion, since he is equally unable to comprehend the sublime mystery of his religion, since he is equally unable to comprehend the sublime mystery of ours, and since both these mysteries equally transcend the human understanding, one cannot be preferred to the other."[19]

Ram Mohan was a great humorous dialectician, while his criticisms took a dramatic form. His *A Dialogue between a Missionary and three Chinese converts* is a masterpiece of sarcasm. The missionary asked his three converts "How many Gods are there?" "Three", "two", and "none" were the answers, which horrified the questioner. He then asked "Why are there three Gods?" The first convert who was a good mathematician said, "Sir, you told me that there was God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, and by my *Swanpan* I find that one and one and one are three." At this the missionary tried to help the convert to understand that the three were one. But the latter told his master point-blank that in China people did not believe in contradictions. On being answered that all this was a mystery he wondered and said, "Is it this that you have been sent 10,000 miles to teach?" The missionary merely cursed the work of the devil in China.

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[19] *Op. cit.*, p. 908.

The second convert was asked "Why are there then two Gods?" He replied that as one of the Gods, namely, the Son, died on the Cross in a Western country long ago there now would only be two Gods. The second convert was no less a mathematician than the first. The missionary now turned to the third convert and asked "Why none?" The reply came that as Jesus was put to death somewhere at the head of the Arabian Gulf about eighteen hundred years ago, there was no God. The only alternative left to the missionary was to pray to God for the damnable Chinese.[20]

Here a word of caution is needed. One should not go away with the idea that Ram Mohan was prejudiced against Christianity. Far from it, he tried to grasp—and we think successfully—the fundamental teaching of Jesus Christ. He maintained, however, that the superstructure built on that teaching was for the most part the work of unenlightened men. He was averse to the dogmas of Christianity, which, in his opinion, were as idolatrous as the prevailing forms of Hindu worship. His ideas about the true form of Christianity found expression in a letter to the Rev. Henry Ware of Cambridge (U.S.A.), in which he wrote:

"I am led to believe, from reason, what is set forth in Scripture, that "in every nation he that *feareth* and worketh *righteousness* is accepted with him", in whatever form of worship he may have been taught to glorify God. Nevertheless, I presume to think that Christianity, if properly inculcated, has a greater tendency to improve the moral and political state of mankind than any other known religious system."[21] Ram Mohan went on to express delight at the fact that some enlightened people in the West were engaged in purifying the religion of Christ from the absurd idolatrous doctrines and practices with which "the Greek, Roman, and Barbarian converts had loaded it from time to time."

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[20] *Op. cit.*, pp. 911-913.
[21] *Op. cit.*, p. 875.

Ram Mohan did much towards the achievement of this object. He learnt Greek and Hebrew in order to read the Old and New Testaments in the original. He studied the Bible, extracted the main teaching of Christ and published a treatise called *The Precepts of Jesus* in 1820. He was convinced that the words of Jesus would promote peace and happiness in the world.

In this treatise he drew mainly upon the Synoptics and took only a few passages from the Gospel according to St. John. He gave as his reason that most of the dogmas of Christianity, which were difficult to comprehend, had been drawn from St. John's Gospel, of which many passages were keenly debated by Biblical scholars. A Christian missionary reviewed the book in the *Friend of India* and expressed the apprehension that it would injure the cause of Christianity. This provoked Ram Mohan to defend his *Precepts of Jesus*. And for a considerable time he was involved in a vigorous polemic against the missionaries.

In the course of the discussion he wrote bulky *Appeals to the Christian Public,* in which he displayed not only his passionate love of truth and his extraordinary power of reasoning, but also his mastery of Biblical literature. His vast erudition, his manner of marshalling his facts and his originality in interpreting Hebrew and Greek texts put him in the front rank of Biblical critics. Unfortunately, however, his contribution to the development of Biblical criticism has not been recognized. In his attitude to the question of the divinity of Christ, to miracles and to the resurrection he anticipated the French school.

Comparative religion is as old as Gnosticism which emerged from a ferment of Greek, Jewish, oriental and Christian ideas in the first and the second century of the Christian era. Some Gnostics developed a study called Rational Theology by way of a comparative analysis of the known religions. Later in the third and the fourth century the Neo-Platonists continued this tradition developing an international pantheon and form of worship. With the supremacy of Christianity in the Roman Empire, especially with the development of the dogma that it was the only true religion, interest in the study of other creeds flagged in the Middle Ages. Later the development of science brought religion as such, and, for that matter, Christianity itself, into discredit at least for a time.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the study of languages and the development of anthropology led to a revival of interest in comparative religion in the West. Its study in India in the early nineteenth century had been pioneered by Ram Mohan, though his work in this connection has attracted little notice. At all events he studied the major religions and searched out the element common to them all—the unity of God. He then sought to build a universal religion based on belief in one God and the worship of Him.

There is little wonder that Unitarianism appealed to Ram Mohan. He passionately wanted Christianity to be presented in its pure form in India, and so organized a Unitarian mission in Calcutta. Mr. William Adam, a Baptist at Serampore, became one of Ram Mohan's close associates. In September, 1821 the Calcutta Unitarian Committee was set up, Ram Mohan Roy, Dwarakanath Tagore, and Prasanna Kumar Tagore being among the members. Now Mr. Adam, often ridiculed by his Christian friends as the second fallen Adam, organized with the help of Ram Mohan in Calcutta a Unitarian mission which received substantial financial aid from Ram Mohan and the Tagores. The Committee rented the public room of the *Harkara* newspaper and library where morning service was held on Sundays.

The founding of the Friendly Association (*Ātmiya Sabhā*) for religious discussion was, as we have seen, Ram Mohan's first attempt to find his Church. The organization of the Unitarian mission represented his second attempt to realize the same purpose. The Unitarian Church would have nothing to do with Incarnation, the Trinity or the anthropomorphic polytheism of popular Hinduism. Ram Mohan, therefore, attended their services with his followers. But the Society could not command a large audience, and the few that were attracted began to dwindle away. Consequently the Unitarian mission was reconstituted with the title "The British Indian Unitarian Association". But there was no improvement and the Sunday congregations were soon reduced almost to zero.[22] Mr. Adam retired heart-broken some time in the first half of 1828. The Unitarian Church had, however, profound significance as it was upon the ruins of this experiment that Ram Mohan's Brāhmo Samāj was built. Some, however, say that he founded a separate Church only at the suggestion of two of his friends, Tarachand Chakravarty and Chandra Sekhar Deb.[23]

Ram Mohan now thought of founding a Church on his own account. He called his friends including Dwarakanath Tagore to a conference at his house and presented a plan, which they all approved. After some searching for a suitable site they commenced public worship in a rented house at Jorasanko. The first service took place on Wednesday, the twentieth of August, 1828,[24] and the native theistic Church was at last brought into being. It was called the Society of God—Brahma Sabhā. Ram Chandra Sarma was the first preacher and Tarachand Chakravarty was the secretary. The new Church discarded ordinary Hindu rites and ceremonies, substituting prayer, the reading of scriptural texts, moral discipline, and the service of men.

This Society, unlike the Unitarian Association, was the product of a Hindu mind and so captured the imagination of enlightened Hindus. It took root and began to grow. Ram Mohan composed hymns in Bengali to be sung there. Later a suitable site was found on which a Church was built for the Brāhmo Samāj. The management was entrusted to a Board of Trustees and in 1830 a Trust Deed was drawn up with a clear declaration of the principles and the form of worship to be practised in the Samāj. Its main terms were as follows:

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[22] Collet: p. 86.
[23] See Sivanath Sastri: *History of the Brahmo Samaj*, Vol. I, p. 39.
[24] *Op. cit.*, p. 1.

"The trustees shall at all times permit the said building to be used as and for a place of public meeting, of all sorts and descriptions of people, without distinction, as shall behave and conduct themselves in an orderly, sober, religious, and devout manner; for the worship and adoration of the Eternal, unsearchable, and Immutable Being, who is the Author and Preserver of the universe, but not under, or by any name, designation, or title, peculiarly used for, and applied to, any particular Being or Beings, by any man, or set of men whatever;

"And that no graven image, statue or sculpture, carving, painting, picture, portrait, or the likeness of anything, shall be admitted within the said premises;

"And that no sacrifice, offering, or oblation of any kind or thing, shall ever be permitted therein and that no animal or living creature shall, within or on the said premises, be deprived of life either for religious purposes or for food;

"And that no eating or drinking (except such as shall be necessary by any accident for the preservation of life), feasting or rioting be permitted therein or thereon;

"And that in conducting the said worship or adoration no object animate or inanimate that has been or is or shall hereafter become or be recognized as an object of worship by any man or set of men shall be reviled or slightly or contemptuously spoken of or alluded to either in preaching, praying, or in the hymns or other modes of worship that may be delivered or used in the said messuage or buildings."[25] And so on.

On January, 23, 1830 the premises of the new Church were ceremonially opened for the purpose of public worship. Ram Mohan's plan for a universal religion at last took shape. Though in fact the Brāhmo Samāj was inaugurated on the

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[25] See Collet: p. 108; also *English Works,* pp. 215-216.

20th of August, 1828, yet the opening of the new building came to be reckoned as the beginning of the Brāhmo era.

In the mean time, however, opposition to Ram Mohan gathered volume all over the country. Because of the abolition of *Suttee,* of his close association with Europeans, and particularly because of his adverse criticism of orthodoxy, both Hindu and Christian, he was attacked from all sides. The Hindus regarded him as the most wicked man on earth. Some even went the length of making an attempt on his life. To the shame of Indians several broad-minded Europeans did their utmost to protect him from these fanatics. In this connection Mr. Montgomery Martin,[26] a journalist, has earned our gratitude by accompanying Ram Mohan and practically serving as his bodyguard during this tense period of his life.

There was nevertheless another side to the scene. The King of Delhi had conferred upon Ram Mohan the title of Raja. The nominal successor of the great Moguls now had a grievance against the East India Company because his allowance was far less than that guaranteed by treaty. So he requested Ram Mohan to redress this legitimate grievance by visiting England as the King's envoy. Another factor helped in Ram Mohan's decision to accept this commission. The East India Company's Charter was near its expiry, and he thought that his presence in England might help towards its renewal in the House of Commons.

As we have seen, Ram Mohan was dead against orthodoxy, yet he supported caste to the extent of observing the Hindu rules of eating and drinking, was averse to the forbidden food and did not eat with Europeans. Nevertheless, he was the first Brahmin to cross the seas. He took with him a Hindu servant, a cook—Ramhurry Das and Ramrotun Mukherjee—and two cows to supply him with pure milk on board the ship.

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[26] This gentleman was editor of the *Bengal Herald,* an English newspaper of which Dwarakanath Tagore and some others became proprietors in 1829.

Ram Mohan sailed from Calcutta on November 19, 1830 and on April 8 reached Liverpool where he was received with great honour. While in England he made many friends and gave many religious discourses. He also did much valuable work both for his country and for England writing tracts to enlighten the British people and Parliament about the conditions of India. He supplied much-sought-for information on the land and the revenue systems and suggested many-sided reforms in the Civil Service. He pleaded convincingly for the inclusion of educated intelligent Indians in the administration of India, pointed to the pressing need for the codification of criminal and civil laws and suggested the lines on which Hindu laws would be reformed so as to bring relief to women and widows.

Ram Mohan was thus overworked. His stormy life at home had already undermined his health, and now under the stress of political work and ceaseless public engagements his steel-framed physique cracked. He fell terribly ill. Singlehanded against tremendous odds Ram Mohan fought throughout his life only for truth, not for any personal ambition. He was indeed the light that illumined the darkness of his age. But he was no more. He breathed his last on the moon-lit night of September 27, 1833[27] in the cottage of Miss Kiddell and Miss Castle with the sacred thread on his breast and with the sacred syllable "Om" on his lips. He was born and brought up in India where he fought against orthodoxy and ignorance. He died in England. Yet before he passed away the new India had been born through his labour. As Romain Rolland puts it, "This man of gigantic personality, whose name to our shame is not inscribed in the Pantheon of Europe as well as of Asia, sank his ploughshare in the soil of India and sixty years of labour left her transformed. A great writer of Sanskrit, Bengali, Arabic, Persian and English, the father of modern Bengali prose, the author of celebrated hymns, poems, sermons, philosophic treatises and political and controversial writings of all kinds, he sowed his thoughts and his passion broadcast. And out of the earth of Bengal has come forth the harvest—a harvest of works and men."[28]

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[27] Collet: p. 147; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. XVIII, 14th edition.

After Ram Mohan's death his close friend Dwarakanath Tagore took charge of the Brāhmo Samāj. And after Dwarakanath's death his mantle fell upon his worthy son Devendranath Tagore, father of Rabindranath the poet. Born of an orthodox aristocratic Brahmin family of Calcutta Devendranath by reason of his penetrating intellect, pure moral character and great spiritual fervour was best fitted for the leadership of the Samāj. His work was somewhat like that of the Fathers of the early Christian Church.

Devendranath was born in Calcutta in 1817. In his adolescence he passed through a moral crisis.[29] But later a change came over him when he was transformed and ushered into spiritual life. He established a religious association called the *Tattvabodhini Sabhā*—the society for the propagation of truth and published a journal, the *Tattvabodhini Patrika,* for the dissemination of his ideas. He joined the Brāhmo Samāj in 1842 and later became the guiding light of the new religion. He organized the Brāhmo form of worship and provided for the training of ministers by developing Brāhmo theology. In 1848 he wrote in Sanskrit a treatise called *The Brāhmo Dharma.* He felt inspired and was influenced by the Upaniṣads. In his own way he formulated four main articles of faith for the Samāj:—

1. In the beginning one supreme Being alone existed. He created the universe.
2. He is one without a second and is infinite, eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent, all-wise and all-perfect.
3. Our salvation depends upon our belief in Him and in worship of Him.
4. Belief consists in loving Him and doing His will.[30]

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[28] *The Life of Ramakrishna,* pp. 113-114, Almora, 1931.
[29] Sivanath Sastri: *History of the Brahmo Samaj,* Vol. I, p. 83.
[30] Romain Rolland: *Life of Ramakrishna,* p. 116; also Ajit Chakravarty: *Maharshi Devendranath Tagore* (in Bengali), pp. 665-686.

There was nothing new about these principles. They were deductions from the main article of faith which had been set forth in the Trust Deed of the Brāhmo Samāj. Devendranath's formulation of them, however, was important, being a clarification of the whole religious outlook of the Samāj. As we have seen above, the illustrious founder had to fight on two fronts, against Hindu idolatry, on the one hand, and Christian orthodoxy, on the other. Now though the Brāhmo Samāj had come to stay, it had to contend with both opponents. And, what was more, Christian propaganda seemed to penetrate the Samāj itself. In these circumstances Devendranath acquitted himself creditably in defence of the Brāhmo Church. He, like Ram Mohan, discarded idolatrous forms of worship, repudiated Śankara's abstract monism and met Dr. Duff's challenge "On what authority doest thou these things?" Devendranath vindicated the right of reason to interpret the Veda and the scriptures.[31]

He then retired to the Himalayas with his young son Rabindranath. Staying there for a few months, he wrote a book of meditations which were pregnant with deep meaning and suggestion. They were later developed into sermons which inspired his audience at prayer meetings. In recognition of his moral excellence and deep spirituality his countrymen gave him the honoured nickname "Maharshi" (great sage). After his return from the Himalayan retreat he was joined by Keshab Chandra Sen, a brilliant young man of twenty. The meeting of these two great men took place in 1862.[32] Keshab Chandra later became head of the Samāj and for some time wielded tremendous influence upon the entire group.

Keshab Chandra was born in Calcutta on the 19th November, 1838. When a boy, he was fair-complexioned, calm and quiet in nature, and there was something angelic about him.[33] We learn much about his young days from his biographer, P. C. Mozoomdar. Keshab, even when quite young, was marked by non-attachment to the world. Unlike ordinary boys, he was not given to mirth and merriment, but was of a contemplative turn of mind. When he was a student at the Hindu College, one of his friends, who was a son of Devendranath Tagore, brought him to Devendranath's house. At that time, we are told, he practised meditation and, due to excess of devotion, suffered from fits.[34]

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[31] K. T. Paul: *British Connection with India*, p. 42.

[32] Chiranjib Sarma: *Keshab Charit*, pp. 20-21, Calcutta, 1894.

[33] P. C. Mozoomdar: *Life of Keshab Chunder Sen*, p. 82, Calcutta, 1887.

Keshab first read at the Hindu College and then at the Metropolitan College. He left in 1858, and then studied mental and moral philosophy. As he grew in years he became more and more sober. Even in his boyhood he was a strict vegetarian. He married in 1856. Nevertheless, he maintained his mental equilibrium and poise and kept up his interest in religious life. He was filled with an undefined yearning which always made him morose and restless. In his autobiography he described his state thus:—

"The house where I lived and the room in which I slept were to me like a wilderness, a graveyard. I regarded the noise of men around me as the howl of wild beasts. Wherever I saw an evil done, it seemed to me as if it were the play ground of the demon of death. Amidst all the wealth of the world I was content to wear coarse clothes. True I did not weep much, but I did not laugh at all. Such was my state when I got up in the morning and when I went to bed at night."[35]

In the mean time the three great universities of Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay were founded, and many schools and colleges were established in Bengal and other parts of India. In them students were introduced to English literature, art and science.[36] And the result was a great cultural upheaval as well as much confusion in the country. Keshab sat for the Senior Scholarship examination in 1856, and an untoward thing happened. Unfortunately he was caught in the examination hall comparing his answers with those of the young friend who was next to him. As a result he was not permitted to take the examination, and he never re-entered for it.

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[34] *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Vol. I, p. 246, Madras, 1930.

[35] *Jivan Veda* (in Bengali), chap. IV, pp. 25-34, 5th impression, Calcutta, 1917; also Mozoomdar, p. 96.

[36] K. T. Paul: p. 32.

Keshab left college in 1858. At that time Hindu society was in a chaotic state. Intellectual confusion and irregularities of conduct were the first fruits of alien education. Indeed society was in travail and the signs of an impending change in it were visible. Young men in schools and colleges studied English authors uncritically and were readily converted to Western ideas. It became fashionable in "Young Bengal" to quote from Shakespeare, Milton and others, both to edify the less educated and to justify conduct which was not in keeping with the traditional indigenous standard. Those who were interested in philosophy feasted on atheistic and sceptical writings.

Many eccentric young men joined the Brāhmo Samāj. But they did so to avoid the restrictions of orthodox Hindu society and for free meals, not for religious reasons. Lord Macaulay said, "A single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia." This impressed the young men profoundly and helped them to be sceptical of the achievements of their forefathers.

Only a few years before Sanskrit and Persian learning had been held in high esteem, but was now discarded as old-fashioned. Agnosticism, anti-religious ideas, utilitarianism, positivism, and so forth, surged upon the country. The Veda, the Upaniṣads, the Gītā and the rest of the Hindu scriptures were sealed books to the educated student. Among some, again, carnal habits and laxity in character became a fashion, while others indulged in alcohol in imitation of their European masters. Some in their scepticism embraced Christianity; others adopted it only for earthly gain, or to solace their souls. Such were the surroundings in which young Keshab found himself.[37]

After he had joined the Brāhmo Samāj Keshab tried to make it a dynamic Church. He wanted it to take the lead in reforming Hindu society. The Brāhmo School had been established in 1859. Now Keshab with the help of Devendranath Tagore evolved an overall plan for the public good. He was to deliver a course of lectures in English, while Devendranath gave discourses in Bengali, in the drab dingy one-storeyed school house at Colootola. Later the school was removed to more respectable quarters where Keshab and Devendranath continued their work. The former spoke eloquently on metaphysics and moral conduct, while the latter dealt with the faith and belief of the Brāhmo Samāj and published a book entitled *Brāhmo Dharmer Mata O Biswas.*

Keshab however was not satisfied with mere words. Driven by an urge for moral perfection and spiritual realization he founded a small society called *Sangat Sabhā,*[38] where he and his friends met for self-analysis and self-culture. Through Devendranath's guidance and Keshab's zeal moral and spiritual progress was made in the Samāj. Keshab was ordained Minister in the Society in 1862[39] and was immediately involved in a tussle with orthodoxy. He wanted to bring his wife to the Brāhmo Samāj to share his ideas and beliefs. But his relatives stood against him. They considered it beneath their dignity and against custom for a young woman of the family to attend a congregation of men, especially of those who had scant regard for Hindu social laws. And Keshab really made a scene. In defiance of his elders he brought his wife to the house of Devendranath and for a time broke off with his family which could not rise above the orthodoxy of the time. Later, however, he was reconciled to his relatives.

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[37] P. C. Mozoomdar: *Keshab Chunder Sen,* pp. 3-13; Bhavasindhu Datta: *Maharshi Devendranath Tagorer Jivan Charit,* chap. XXVIII.

[38] Chiranjib Sarma: *Keshab Charit,* p. 35.

[39] *Op. cit.,* p. 134.

Keshab was indeed a God-intoxicated man. As there was no one like him, Devendranath conferred upon him the well-merited title *Brahmānanda* (one who rejoices in God). But some of his ideas seemed rather extremist to Devendranath. The principle that the Brāhmo Samāj inherited from Ram Mohan was never to allow anyone except good Brahmins to officiate in the pulpit. By the installation of Keshab as minister this principle had been abandoned. Devendranath being a Brahmin was by nature a conservative. He nevertheless tolerated, although he did not like, intermarriage between castes when it took place with the sanction of the Brāhmo Samāj. Keshab, on the contrary, was over-enthusiastic on the subject and even went further by encouraging and supporting the remarriage of widows.

Ram Mohan had been a pioneer in female emancipation as in other fields, and had fought hard for the rights of women. But he did not advocate the indiscriminate remarriage of widows. According to him, only child widows would take a second husband, if, of course, they wanted to.[40] The remarriage of a widow with children was simply repulsive to Ram Mohan. As we see, Devendranath could not conscientiously support widows' remarrying, far less marriage between castes. Moreover some of the elderly Brāhmos were strongly opposed to the new ideas of Keshab and his followers.

Devendranath was of an emotional turn of mind and was moved by the beauties of Nature, while his emotions outpoured into his sermons. Free from Christian education and influence, he owed allegiance to the Veda which was the prime source of his inspiration. He wanted therefore to establish an ideal Hindu society by reviving ancient Upaniṣadic culture, and with him the Brāho Samāj was only the beginning. Keshab also wanted to remodel Hindu society. But, unlike Devendranath, he was not enamoured of ancient times. He was eager to go forward and reform society and religion root and branch. Keshab was thoroughgoing in his outlook and Devendranath knew that he was deeply interested in Jesus Christ and the Bible. All this made for a rupture in the Samāj. The difference between the two Brāhmo leaders gradually became more and more pronounced until in 1866 the separation between Tagore and Sen took place.

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[40] *English Works of Ram Mohun Roy*, p. xvi ; also Nagendranath Chatterjee: *Life of Ram Mohun*, p. 309, Allahabad, 1928.

Keshab made his position clear in his parting address to his beloved master.[41] In this brief sketch of the history of the Samāj he showed how the new India with its new religion had been brought into existence by the life-work of Ram Mohan Roy. He then traced the steps and the stages by which the Brāhmo Samāj developed and expanded all over the country under the guidance of Devendranath, and ended by paying an eloquent tribute of love and gratitude to the venerable sage.

This shows that Keshab was a great and sincere soul. Though he came to differ from Devendranath, he had no bitter feelings against him. His heart instead overflowed with love and gratitude for the light and guidance he had received from Devendranath. Anyway, the great Brāhmo Samāj was now split up into two distinct groups. The Society of the elders still faithful to the Maharshi was known as the Ādi Brāhmo Samāj, whereas the new Society was called the Brāhmo Samāj of India. Keshab declared that the latter had no human leader and that God alone was its head. He published a Bengali journal called *Dharma Tattva* as the organ of the new Church in opposition to the *Tattvabodhini,* the organ of the old Samāj.

Keshab's catholic Church was open to men and women irrespective of race and community, and the form of worship was far more eclectic than ever before in the Brāhmo Samāj. The scripture of the Brāhmo Samāj of India included selections from the scriptures of the world—the Veda, the Zend-Avesta, the Bible, and the Korān. Keshab made an extensive tour of the country enlisting members for his Samāj and sought to make it a universal Church.

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[41] Mozoomdar: *Life of Keshab Chunder Sen,* pp. 166-167.

A few months after the separation from Devendranath Keshab gave a lecture on "Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia" which created quite a stir in the country, particularly among his old friends and followers. It was his first public utterance on Jesus and it established his reputation as a great orator.[42]

"Christ's influence", said he, "but a small rivulet at first increased in depth and breadth as it rolled along and swept away in its irresistible tide the impregnable strongholds of error and superstition and the accumulated corruptions of centuries." He went on, "In Christ we see not only the exaltedness of humanity, but also the grandeur of which Asiatic nature is susceptible. The more this is pondered the less I hope will be the antipathy and hatred of European Christians for Oriental nationalities, and the greater the interest of Asiatics in the teachings of Christ."

Rumours were afloat that Keshab was going to adopt Christianity, so that Devendranath and his group congratulated themselves on their wisdom in breaking off with the Anglicized Keshab. On the other hand, high hopes rose in the hearts of the Christian missionaries that the day was not distant when they would find him in their fold. In a letter dated May 18, 1866, addressed to Pratap, he wrote:

"Of course, I have my own ideas about Christ, but I am not bound to give them out in due form until the altered circumstances of the country gradually develop them out of my mind. Jesus is identical with self-sacrifice, and as he lived and preached in the fulness of time, so must he be in turn preached in the fulness of time. The more sacrifice is needed in India, and the more it is made, the more will Jesus find a home in this land."[43]

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[42] Mozoomdar: p. 176.
[43] *Op. cit.*, pp. 178-179.

It is not quite clear what Keshab meant when he said that Jesus must be preached "in the fulness of time". It is, however, certain that he envisaged a time when India would accept Christ Anyway, five months after his first lecture on Jesus he gave a discourse on "great men" in the Town Hall of Calcutta. As Mozoomdar points out, this was a forecast of his future development.[44] He described the threefold revelation of God: in Nature, in history, and in the soul. He dwelt upon the second kind of revelation and explained the doctrine of Incarnation. According to him, the divine nature in its absolute perfection is not embodied in an Incarnation. The latter is not God assuming a human body finite in space and time ; "Incarnation" meant to him that God became manifest in humanity.

The spirit of Vaiṣṇava religion also found its way into Keshab's Brāhmo Samāj. A new kind of devotional music had been introduced into Bengal by Sri Chaitanya. This music, *sankirtan* as it was called, was adopted in the Brāhmo Samāj of India. By an impulse, so to speak, Keshab picked out much of the popular Hindu religion. Trailokyanath Sanyal, who was a great musician, and Bijoy Krishna Goswami, who was originally a Vaiṣṇava devotee, contributed a good deal to the development of this devotional side of the new Samāj. But the main cause of it all was the exceedingly devotional nature of the leader.

Keshab in his autobiography said that he relied on both faith and reason.[45] In the same work he averred that if religion began in fear, it ended in love, bliss, and delight. Undoubtedly this was why he was irresistibly attracted by the personalities of Jesus and Sri Chaitanya,[46] in whom divine love in its full glory was embodied. It seems that Keshab also believed in the miracles ascribed to Jesus Christ and others. He pointed out that the extraordinary powers, which work miracles, such as feeding a lakh of men on a piece of bread, would accrue to one through absolute renunciation and complete spiritual perfection.[47]

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[44] *Op. cit.*, p. 181.
[45] *Jivan Veda*, p. 3.
[46] *Op. cit.*, p. 108.

One day when his Samāj was well-established Keshab announced in his organ, the *Indian Mirror,* that he would leave for England and he did so on February 15, 1870. On his arrival he found that a crowded programme was awaiting him. Indeed during his sojourn in England he was very busy with presentations and private calls. He also addressed a large number of meetings and discussed many religious themes. In a lecture at St. James's Hall he expounded his attitude towards Christ and Christianity, and was well received and appreciated. The *London Spectator* made the following remarks:

"A unique sort of lecture on 'Christ and Christianity' was delivered last Saturday at St. James's Hall by Keshab Chunder Sen from the standpoint of Indian theism. . . . . . The moderation and kindliness with which Mr. Sen indicated the shortcomings of English Christianity, and the fervent eloquence with which he painted the realities of a true spiritual faith, made a very favourable impression upon a large and mixed audience."[48]

After some time Keshab duly returned to India and devoted himself to the problem of reforming Hindu society. He was, however, increasingly under the influence of the teaching of Jesus Christ. And gradually he persuaded himself to accept the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, especially those of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. He also accepted much of Hindu polytheism by way of an interpretation of the attributes of God.

As we have seen, Ram Mohan was provoked as much by Hindu idolatry and polytheism as by Christian orthodoxy and dogmatism. Hindu superstitions and Christian egotism constituted for him a self-contradictory thesis. He rejected as absurd Hindu gods and goddesses along with the doctrine of Incarnation both Hindu and Christian as well as the

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[47] *Op. cit.,* p. 93.
[48] Mozoomdar, p. 224.

Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Ram Mohan nevertheless found one central element common to the two religions—belief in God as One and as the Creator and Preserver of the universe. This conception of one God invisible and incorporeal, but personal with attributes as taught in the Upaniṣads was the foundation upon which Ram Mohan built up his religion. In Keshab the antithesis which Ram Mohan's attitude represented and with which the former actually started in his spiritual career was passing back into the thesis itself with which Ram Mohan began. And there was need for a much deeper outlook which would have resolved the dead-lock. But it could not be developed on the basis of intellectual study or an impulsive and emotional approach to the religions concerned.

The dead-lock was brought into bold relief by a religious movement on foot in the north-western corner of India. We shall see presently that this movement in its turn represented the passing of the above-mentioned thesis back again into the antithesis. Keshab's pro-Christian ideas already aroused suspicion in many minds that he was out to Christianize the country. Reactions had set in and the Hindus organized themselves in defence of their faith.

Towards the end of 1866 Keshab toured the districts of East Bengal. With his saintly friends Bijoy Krishna Goswami and Aghornath Gupta he created a sensation there, and the orthodox Hindus were alarmed. In their solicitude for their age-old religion they founded the *Hindu Dharma Rakshini Sabhā* (Society for the preservation of Hindu religion), *Hari Sabhā, Ārya Sabhā,* etc. to counter Keshab's agitation. At last an ardent champion of Hinduism appeared on the scene. He was a sannyasin named Dayānanda Saraswati. He called the attention of his compatriots to the golden days of the Veda and Upaniṣads and exhorted them to give up superstitions, renounce pernicious customs and practise pure Aryan religion.

Dayānanda was born in 1824 of a rich aristocratic Brahmin family at Mourvi in the State of Kathiawar in

Gujrat far away from Bengal.[40] His father Amba Shanker was Collector of Revenue in the State and also carried on an extensive business. In his childhood he was called Mool Shanker. This Brahmin boy, when nine years old, was invested with the holy thread in accordance with the family custom. For the next six years he studied Sanskrit grammar and the Veda, and even when in his teens knew by heart the major portion of the scriptures. During this time on the day of Śiva-worship Moolji observed the fast with his father. That night, however, he found to his surprise a mouse dancing on the image of Śiva in the family shrine and eating the offerings on it. This had a peculiar significance for Moolji ; it revealed to him that the image of God was inert and could not prevail against a tiny animal like a mouse. This filled him with disgust at image-worship, a feeling which clung to his mind to the last day of his life.

When Moolji was about eighteen years old his sister died and a year later he saw his uncle pass away. The death of these dear ones impressed upon him the transitoriness of human life. The problems of life and existence now seized his mind, and he made it his life's occupation to solve them. He now resolved to renounce the world in search of Truth. But his father stood in his way. He wanted to put Moolji right by marrying him. Though the son resisted, his protestations were unheeded, and preparations for his marriage were in full swing. Two alternatives were open to Moolji: to marry and live a worldly life or to leave home once and for all. He chose the latter course and renounced the world to satisfy his hunger for light. He then wandered from place to place in India. At the age of twenty-four he was initiated into sannyasa (mendicant life) by Swami Purnananda of the Sringagiri Math at Chanode-Kalyani in Narmada. It was Purnananda who gave him the name Dayānanda Saraswati.

Dayānanda wandered through the hills and forests of

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[40] Dayānanda: *Satyārtha-Prakāsah*, Bengali edition, p. ix, Calcutta, 1947 ; M. Z. S. Nigama: *Vedic Religion and its Expounder Swami Dayananda Saraswati*, p. 1 ; Lajpat Rai: Arya Samaj, p. 3, London, 1915.

India studying the various systems of yoga and philosophy. At last he came to Swami Virajananda, the great Vedic pundit of Mathura.[50] He stayed long with Virajananda as his disciple and with his help mastered the Pānini (Sanskrit grammar), various philosophical systems, the Upaniṣads, and the Laws of Manu.

Before leaving Mathura Dayānanda promised to his teacher that he would devote himself to the correct interpretation of the Veda and establish Vedic religion in the country by refuting all its rivals. He redeemed this pledge to the letter. From now on he took upon himself the arduous task of reforming Hinduism and replacing idolatrous forms of worship by pure Vedic religion. As a result he clashed with orthodox Brahmins and pundits. But he was more than a match for his opponents, meeting them on their own ground and fighting them with their own weapons. Both accepted the Veda as their final authority, but Dayānanda was so well-versed in the Vedic lore that none could cope with him in controversy.

How image-worship originated and developed in India is a long story.[51] There is no trace of it in the Veda or the Upaniṣads. Dayānanda was therefore on strong ground in opposing it. He was undefeated in the innumerable debates and conferences in which Sanskrit scholars of the country confronted him. On finding that he could not be defeated by reasoning some tried to subdue him by force. The wise and intelligent appreciated him and acclaimed him as a great saint and seer. But on many occasions he was greeted with angry words, vilification, even with volleys of brickbats. And his only fault was that he wanted his fellow-countrymen to grasp the real meaning of the scriptures and to give up superstitious practices and customs. He continued his work undaunted.

Dayānanda was indeed a lion among men. His was a massive iron-built physique and a mind grimly determined to raise the country to its former glory. He wore only a loin cloth, spoke Sanskrit as if it were his mother tongue and smeared his body with ashes. His was an original mind, and his mastery of Sanskrit stood him in good stead in interpreting the scriptural texts.

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[50] Lajpat Rai: *Arya Samaj*, p. 29.

[51] See J. N. Banerjee: *Development of Hindu Iconography*, Calcutta, 1941.

Dayānanda was staying in Banaras, a great centre of learning and stronghold of orthodoxy, when a member of the Brāhmo Samāj invited him to Calcutta which he reached on December 15, 1872. The brother of Raja Jatindra Mohan Tagore arranged for him to live in a garden house where the élite of the city visited him to discuss the reform and reconstruction of Hinduism. The schism in the Brāhmo Samāj had already occurred. Nevertheless, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore and his worthy sons were delighted and inspired by the talks they had with the Swami. Keshab Chandra Sen also came to see the learned sannyasin and was highly impressed by him.

Dayānanda completed his tour of the country at Bombay where he established an organization, the Ārya Samāj on April 7, 1875.[52] He had not intended to found a Society of his own as he thought that his work was not absolutely new and that the Brāhmo Samāj was sufficient. But he was disillusioned about the latter in Calcutta. There were two rival groups and he formed the idea rightly or wrongly that the Brāhmo Samāj deviated from the path Ram Mohan Roy had laid down for his countrymen to follow. In any case, the Brāhmo Samāj could not accept Dayānanda because the latter insisted on certain Vedic sacrificial rites as a form of worship, whereas the two Brāhmo groups still adhered to the principles laid down that no rite nor oblation of any kind should be performed within the precincts of the Samāj.

There was much common ground between Dayānanda and the Brāhmos. Both were opposed to idolatry and put a premium upon the teaching of the Veda and Upaniṣads.

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[52] *Satyārtha-Prakāsah*, p. xiii, Bengali edition.

Moreover the interpretation that Dayānanda put upon these texts was much the same as that of Ram Mohan. Further he shared the views of the latter on the *guru*-cult, Incarnation, caste and social reform. There was, however, an important difference between them on the Veda. For Ram Mohan no scriptures including the Veda were infallible ; he accepted only those teachings of the sacred books which were amenable to reason. Devendranath went a little further. He took the Veda, especially the Upaniṣads, on trust, but was not prepared to accept them as final authority unless the truths contained in them were tested afresh by direct spiritual experience.[53] With Keshab it was the same.[54] But for Dayānanda the Veda was final and beyond question. Obviously his overemphasis on sacrificial rites as forming part of daily worship prevented him from joining the Brāhmo Samāj. As we have seen above, Keshab was inclined to Christianity and incorporated many elements of popular Hinduism into the Brāhmo-cult. It was this more than anything else that gave Dayānanda the impression that one group of the Samāj at any rate was not strictly following the teaching of Ram Mohan.

That Dayānanda was not very serious about setting up a new organization is evident from the fact that he later endeavoured to unite his newly-started Samāj with the Theosophical Society. This society was founded in America by Madame Blavatsky during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Theosophy is generally regarded as an esoteric doctrine. But it is in the main an affirmation of the teaching of the Veda and Upaniṣads. Theosophy etymologically means knowledge of God. It is in fact the science of God which in Sanskrit is called *Brahma-vidyā*. The ordinary sciences give us knowledge of the empirical world in its manifold aspects, whereas the science of *Brahman* or Reality leads us to the highest possible kind of knowledge.

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[53] Ajit Chakravarty: *Maharshi Devendranath Tagore* (in Bengali), pp. 95, 211.

[54] *Jivan Veda,* p. 41.

Theosophy can therefore be called gnosis as against agnosticism, which is the negation of the knowledge of God.

The agnostic says that Reality or God is wholly transcendent and beyond our reach. Theosophy, however, declares that man is spiritual in his essential nature and so can know God directly. In Mrs. Besant's words, "Now that is one of the oldest affirmations in the world; it lies at the root of every great religion of the past and of the present. It is the declaration that, man being a spiritual being and the spiritual nature being the profoundest part of himself, by the unfolding of that, by the knowledge, in the deepest sense, of himself, man is able to reach the knowledge of the supreme, of the universal life".[55] But this is not all. Theosophy is also a body of teachings, which comprise the central doctrines of different religions. The work of archaeologists and anthropologists in the last century had inspired a new study, comparative mythology, which consisted in the analysis and comparison of legends, rites and ceremonies found in various religions at different levels of civilization. Comparative religion, as we call it today, began as comparative mythology. Some then maintained that all religions came from the same source, from the ignorance of primitive men, and that the organized religions of the civilized world had come about through a refinement of the old superstitions and fancies.

At this stage Theosophy appeared in the West with its message of ancient divine wisdom.[56] It laid emphasis on the inner core of religion and stressed the need for studying religions in their innermost aspect. In this way the new spiritual science brought about a new approach to the subject. Comparative religion arose by way of perfecting comparative mythology. Theosophical teachings are the doctrines supposed to be common to all religions, namely: one God manifested in the universe; the hierarchies of superhuman beings—Devas, Angels, and Archangels ; the Incarnation of Spirit in matter ; re-incarnation ; the law of Karma, of action and reaction—the principle "As you sow, so you reap" ; the Path to perfection ; divine men ; and the three worlds—the physical, the astral, and the heavenly.

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[55] *Theosophy: Its Meaning And Value*, p. 5, Madras, 1935.

[56] *Op. cit.*, p. 11; also Besant: *Theosophy*, p. 14, London, The People's Book Series.

With these doctrines Theosophists propounded, as they claimed, a universal religion acceptable to all.[57] Here we need not go into detail. We should, however, note that Theosophy was built on the basis of the yogic tradition and mystical realization of the East. For details of worlds beyond the physical, of the doctrine of Karma, and the rest, Theosophy drew upon Eastern lores, particularly the Upaniṣads, the teachings of the Buddha and the Tantra. Theosophy, therefore, appeared to be an Eastern discipline and naturally attracted Dayānanda, who was all for one God and one path and was enamoured of the Vedic age. Theosophy in its development, however, came to emphasize other worlds with reference to which human life on earth was to be shaped. In the end Theosophists became preoccupied with the ways of the dead and were associated with spiritism and occultism.

Be that as it may, Dayānanda's reputation as an oriental scholar reached across the seas. Madame Blavatsky wanted to establish a Theosophical centre in India and she thought that Dayānanda with his vast erudition could help in her noble project. On the other hand, the Ārya Samāj on its own initiative suggested that they merge with the Theosophical Society and this was accepted by Madame Blavatsky in a letter dated May, 1878.[58] The name of the Ārya Samāj was then changed to "The Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj of Aryavarta", and Dayānanda was recognized as the lawful director and chief of the Theosophical Society and its branches in America and Europe.

Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky came out to India in 1879 to see Dayānanda, and they met again the next year.

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[57] *Op. cit.,* p. 69.
[58] Nigama: *Dayananda Saraswati,* p. 19.

But this led to the separation of the Ārya Samāj from the Theosophical Society, whose conception of the three worlds, the hierarchies of superhuman beings, divine men and the rest proved too much for Dayānanda. He considered these views to be in line with the idolatry that he was fighting.

Dayānanda now fell back upon himself and proceeded to work independently of the Theosophists. He established Vedic schools and centres of the Ārya Samāj all over the country in order to propagate his ideas. He had already published his *magnum opus*—*Satyārtha-Prakāsh*, the revelation of the true meaning of the Veda, which now became the gospel of his Church. He also wrote some minor treatises to guide the worship and to regulate the conduct of the Ārya Samājists.

In the *Satyārtha-Prakāsah* Dayānanda formulated his new religion by way of a new interpretation of the Veda and made an elaborate attempt to show that all non-Vedic religions, including idolatrous Hinduism, are false. The view current in his time was that Vedic religion was originally one of sacrifices to different gods and goddesses and that the Vedic people only later attained to the conception of one God as the Creator and Ordainer of the universe. Dayānanda repudiated this view. He maintained that the Veda in all its aspects and at all levels posited one God and that Vedic religion, far from being polytheistic, was thoroughly monotheistic or monistic. He sought to show by detailed study that the names of the so-called gods and goddesses are those of one supreme Being who is there at the back of the universe.

According to Dayānanda, the word "Varuṇa" means a Being who is supreme among all beings, or a Being who accepts those who are pure, learned and strive to be or are liberated; or a Being in whom the pious and spiritually developed seek shelter. In any case, "Varuṇa" means the Lord of the universe. Similarly the term "Indra" signifies power and splendour, and means the omnipotent Being, that

The cardinal principles and conceptions upon which Dayānanda founded his religion were:—

1. God is one; He is invisible and without form, but has spiritual attributes, such as knowledge, existence and bliss absolute; He is eternal, immutable, omnipotent, the Creator, Preserver and Ordainer.
2. The Veda is infallible.
3. *Dharma* (religion and moral conduct) consists in acting in accordance with the laws and commands of God as revealed in the Veda.
4. The individual soul is finite, but is eternal.
5. God being infinite pervades the universe and also individual souls. But there is an intrinsic difference between God and a finite soul.
6. There are three eternal principles—God, soul and Prakriti, the material cause of the world.
7. The cause of the contact of these principles is eternal.
8. The creation proves the Creator.
9. Liberation or salvation is a state in which one is rid of suffering and in which one moves about with perfect liberty in infinite God and in His Creation.
10. The means of salvation is the practice of religion which consists of meditation with the help of the Gāyatrī, yoga, good company, study of the Veda, continence, the performance of moral duties and of some sacrificial rites.
11. Heaven is no region where the dead reside enjoying the fruits of the meritorious work of their past lives. Heaven is the state of absolute happiness and bliss.
12. Hell is similarly the state of extreme sufferings.
13. Yajna is a complex of performances which are as follows: paying respect to the wise and the learned, imparting knowledge, adding to the well-being of the world, and offering to the sacred fire oblations which purify the atmosphere and promote the health of the people.
14. The caste of an individual is determined by merit and worth.

15. The wise, learned and pure are gods.

16. The knowledge of the Veda is not a monopoly of the Brahmins.

Dayānanda wanted to remodel Hindu society into a four-class organization on Vedic lines according to the inborn qualities and dispositions of individuals and to the division of labour. He did not believe in caste and vehemently opposed image-worship. He rejected the popular conception of heaven and hell and ridiculed the idea that God incarnated Himself by assuming human form through human birth.[62]

We have covered much ground and seen how in the first quarter of the last century Ram Mohan rose in revolt against Hindu priesthood, which, according to him, had saddled religion and society with superstitions. He was convinced that rationalism was the remedy for all ills. He pointed out that there was in every man the light of reason which he should exercise in his life. Blind faith and bland submission to religious authority were two fruitful sources of superstition, dogmatism, and fanaticism. Ram Mohan wondered why people pinned their faith in absurd cults and creeds instead of thinking for themselves. He told us that reflection on the nature and constitution of the universe revealed one supreme Being as the Creator of it.

The unity of God as guaranteed by reason was the central principle with Ram Mohan and was indeed the rock upon which he built his Church. If he referred to the sacred books of different religions, he did so only to bring home to the minds of his contemporaries that the unity of God was the principle common to the religions. Ram Mohan, however, did not accept any book as infallible. He went deep in his study of the Veda and Upaniṣads. But he did so only to expose the folly of polytheism and to show to the Hindus with whom the Veda was the greatest authority that their scriptures spoke only of one God.

The unity of God had also another use. Ram Mohan perceived that the religion of one God without any parochial creed would prove a universal religion acceptable to all. But there were obvious difficulties. First, if reason were the sole guide in man's life, it might lead to atheism instead of to one God. As we know, many in the past came logically to the conclusion that matter was the ultimate reality and that there was nothing like soul or spirit, far less a being called God. Reason is avowedly the organ of philosophy. But there is no finality about any philosophical view; reason in its operation often leads to alternative conceptions, especially regarding the ultimate nature of reality.

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[62] *Satyārtha-Prakāsah* (Bengali edition), pp. 672-679 ; also Sri Sankarnath Pandit: *Dayānanda Jīvan Charit,* p. 173.

Secondly, a universal, whatever it is in its essence, is no particular. So a universal religion is a misnomer. We, of course, speak of it as the idea of religion embodied in the different faiths. But the idea of religion is not merely the belief in one God. On the contrary, Ram Mohan created one which consisted of well-defined creeds. And his so-called universal religion was another among the many already in existence.

Dayānanda Saraswati indeed shared Ram Mohan's rationalism. But there was a clear difference between them. Whereas the latter was all for reason, Dayānanda regarded it only as an aid to faith. He had unshaken faith in the Veda as embodying the highest spiritual experiences of the Indian seers of the past. He reasoned and argued, however, to show that all non-Vedic religions are false. He employed reason even in his effort to formulate the content of his religion. He subscribed to Ram Mohan's conception of one God, but, unlike Ram Mohan, he derived his conception of God from an interpretation of Vedic texts.

It is a commonplace that different Vedic scholars interpret their texts differently. Max Müller and Sri Aurobindo, for example, differ widely from each other in their conceptions of the Vedic gods and goddesses. Dayānanda himself explained the Veda in yet another way and preferred one to all the rest. This shows that no human interpretation of the scriptures, and all interpretation is human, could be final.

If so, no one could through textual analysis attain to the spiritual experiences which the Veda was supposed to embody.

Dayānanda was rather aggressive in his conception that Vedic religion was the only one worth the name. It is difficult to agree with him that the spiritual experiences of Vedic seers were the highest achievement of humanity in the realm of spirit and that the ages that followed marked the line of degradation from that peak of spirituality. Neither Ram Mohan nor Dayānanda could recognize the gems of spiritual truth which were attained in the post-Upaniṣadic periods of Indian history. The mass of superstition, prejudice and corrupt symbolism of popular Hinduism in their time covered up those spiritual truths.

In the nineteenth century Christianity received a rude shock from science, particularly from the theory of evolution. The age-old Christian dogmas and doctrines seemed to be nullified. As a result a wave of scepticism swept educated and cultured circles. As a reaction to this sceptical movement Theosophy as a religion and philosophy arose in the West. But Theosophy was only a modern version of Eastern wisdom. No wonder then that there was an affinity between the Brāhmo Samāj, the Ārya Samāj and the Theosophical Society. All three were convinced that the highest spiritual truths would only be found in the ancient lores, in the Veda. So they turned to the past. But each of them claimed the status of a universal religion.

The Theosophists were more accommodating than the Brāhmos and the Ārya Samājists. They recognized the essential elements of other faiths and by a combination of them created an eclectic religion, though they retained their emphasis upon the past. But the main problem whether religion was a fabrication or was rooted in our deepest nature was not solved. There was also the problem whether religions, each of which claimed a monopoly of Truth, contradicted one another. Syncretism was no solution. Neither was exegesis the proper way to tackle it. There was imperative need for spiritual realization in order to vindicate religion as a phenomenon and to assess the value of religions. This need Keshab felt more than anybody else.[63] That was why he was increasingly drawn to such men of God-realization as Sri Chaitanya and Jesus Christ. In short, in their complexities and contradictions the religio-philosophical upheavals that marked nineteenth-century India laid the scene for the activities of a master soul who was Sri Ramakrishna.

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[63] *Jivan Veda* (in Bengali), p. 38.

CHAPTER III

RAMAKRISHNA—A MODERN INCARNATION OF GOD

Ramakrishna was born at Kamarpukur, a village in a quiet corner of Bengal, on February 17, 1836. He came of an orthodox Brahmin family called Chattopadhyaya. His parents—Khudiram Chattopadhyaya and Chandramani Devi were held in high esteem for their piety and noble character. They were poor, but their poverty was no obstacle to the intensely spiritual life that they lived. Those were indeed the days of plenty, and with their meagre means they managed to support themselves and their children. As in every Brahmin family, there was a chapel to their humble dwelling where they daily worshipped the household Deity—Raghuvira (Sri Rāma).

Kamarpukur, some twenty miles away from Tarakeswar with its famous temple of Lord Śiva, was at that time connected by road to some distant towns, but there were no railways in the district, so that if the villagers wished to travel they had to do so by boat or on foot. To go on a pilgrimage to holy places was, as it is today, considered by the Hindus a great act of piety.

Khudiram had a well-built physique, a fair complexion and comely features. Although well-advanced in years, he went on a pilgrimage to the different temples and sacred places of South India, and he travelled on foot throughout. He went as far south as Rameswara which is near Cape Comorin. It was really a feat to cover such a long distance on foot, which would stagger any able-bodied young man of today. Anyway, in due course Khudiram returned home and settled down again to his daily duties. All this happened in 1814. He had already been blessed with one son and one daughter. Some time after his return from Rameswara his third—a son was born.

Twenty-one years later, in 1835 Khudiram set out on another pilgrimage. He was then about sixty years old. This time, however, he did not undertake an extensive tour. He went straight to Gayā, a holy place in Bihar, where Hindus worshipped Lord Viṣṇu invoking blessings for those they had loved who were dead. And so it was with Khudiram. He performed the usual rites and worship, but that night he had a strange dream. In it he came to the temple of Viṣṇu where the Lord in a luminous body told him lovingly that He would be born on earth as his son. This sent a thrill through his whole frame. And when he awoke the flood of delight was still in him, and it was some time before it subsided.

Khudiram did not take his experience very seriously, dismissing it as a mere dream. But his recollection of the saying that dreams about things divine are true gave him pause. Nevertheless he could not quite reconcile himself to this dream experience ; for it appeared to him to be far too deep and good to be true.

While Khudiram was away at Gayā, his wife Chandramani dreamt one night that a god with a shining body lay on her bed. And this upset her for some time. Later when she stood in front of the temple of Śiva, which was near her house, a pencil of light from the image of the God entered her—or so she thought—and the whole place was divinely illuminated. She was overwhelmed by this strange experience and lost consciousness for some time. Although afraid that she was suffering from neurosis, she felt that she had conceived. But this was an unexplainable phenomenon which got upon her nerves. When Khudiram returned home he found Chandramani transformed and she told him all that had happened to her. He was both surprised and delighted that his dream at Gayā agreed with Chandramani's unique experience at Kamarpukur. But he was dumb-

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founded. He asked Chandramani to be calm and quiet and to wait patiently for what might come.

As the days rolled by it became clear that Chandramani was with child. She was about forty-five and was marked with unearthly beauty and grace. Her neighbours thought this to be an ominous sign and whispered that the old lady would surely die. Chandramani for her part could not agree. A new world had opened out to her. Visions of gods and goddesses with luminous forms became daily occurrences and she was filled with unspeakable joy. In this way her time passed and she was now near her confinement. At last the auspicious day arrived on which she gave birth to a male child.

Khudiram was very poor and in his humble home there was no lying-in room. A drab corner of the house where paddy used to be husked in an uncouth wooden machine was chosen for Chandramani's confinement. An oven filled with ashes was there as well. Strange it was that the new-born child despite the nurse's care slipped into the oven and got smeared with the ashes. Anyway, the glad news got about and some of Chandramani's friends came and congratulated ber on the birth of a healthy beautiful child. Khudiram, old as he was, felt blessed. But few realized that an extraordinary person who was to guide the destiny of mankind had been born in the cottage.

It is a custom with the Hindus to consult an astrologer about a new-born babe and cast its horoscope. Khudiram did so and the calculations showed that the child was a genius. When Khudiram and Chandramani learnt of this their joy knew no bounds. Then the proper birth-rites were performed and the child was christened Gadādhar. Now the parents devoted themselves to the child and served it with all their mind and heart.

Gadādhar grew to be seven or eight months old. One day his mother put him to bed under a mosquito curtain and left the room. On her return she did not find Gadādhar; instead she saw a tall unknown person lying on his bed.

Terribly anxious and frightened, she shrieked, rushed out and cried for help. Khudiram ran to her. But to Chandramani's utter surprise he found nobody on the bed except his little son, who was fast asleep. In spite of constant god-visions and other mystical experiences Chandramani could not help thinking that her child was possessed by a ghost. She was too human and naturally was much concerned for her son. Her saintly husband reassured her, but she continued to be anxious until she had prayed to the family Deity for the protection of her child.

As Gadādhar grew in years the genius in him began to show. He had a prodigious memory. While a mere child he learnt by rote the long list of names of his forefathers and many prayer poems. He was taught by story-tellers innumerable tales of the great Epics—the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata. But he was never at ease with arithmetic. He could not be made to learn the multiplication table which every child should know before it goes to school.

Gadādhar was apparently a fickle-minded boy, and it seemed that something inscrutable within him was driving him nobody knew where. As his father could not cope with his restlessness, he sent him to school at the age of five. He was happy in his new surroundings and soon endeared himself to his class-mates and to the teachers as well. That was in the village primary school which had been established long before by the local zemindar family, the Lāhās.

As Khudiram observed, there was a sort of obstinacy in Gadādhar. He did not like some of the boy's pranks, yet remembering his dream at Gayā he was not too hard on his son, rather it was not easy to control the child. However, he was doing pretty well at school, as, though he remained averse to mathematics, he was active in many other directions. There were potters and modellers in the village. Gadādhar often went to observe them at their work and learnt the art of image-making and modelling. He could also paint beautiful scenery and figures. Religious dramas were given in the village by strolling players. After having watched and witnessed several performances he mastered the art of acting. The boy had a great fund of humour which made him a cynosure to his friends and neighbours. He had infinite affection for his family and ever-growing devotion to gods and goddesses.

Chandramani was very kind-hearted and generous. Though poor, she was ever solicitous for the well-being of her neighbours standing by them in their sufferings and distress. Gadādhar inherited her qualities of heart which he exhibited in full when he became a great shepherd in his later life. When the boy was seven an uncommon event took place. As we have seen, Gadādhar was born a healthy child and had not hitherto suffered from any ailment. He was in robust health, gay and free in spirit. It was observed, however, that whenever he concentrated upon anything he became oblivious of his surroundings. This is interesting as it sheds much light upon the mystical side of his nature.

One summer morning Gadādhar had a strange experience. As he was strolling along a path with his friends eating puffed rice, a thick black cloud came up. As it spread over the whole sky a flock of white cranes flew by beneath it. The cloud and the cranes appeared so beautiful that Gadādhar was overwhelmed by the sight and fell into a trance. He dropped to the ground unconscious, and the puffed rice in his hand was scattered. His comrades were nonplussed. Recovering from the shock, they ran to Gadādhar's house to inform his parents of his plight. He was carried home and nursed back to consciousness. This was the first manifestation of the mystic in Gadādhar.

Broadly speaking, mysticism means the superintellectual blissful realization of the fundamental unity of the world. But there are different levels of mystical experience. The artist's appreciation of beauty and the ecstatic joy that proceeds from it mark the lowest level of mysticism, in the sense that the artist rises to the vision of the Supreme on the basis of the sensuous. Physical beauty is the sensuous garb in which the supreme Being presents Himself to those who can see it.

Now Gadādhar was an artist, we may say that he was a superlative one since a really beautiful sight sent him into a state of trance. Plato emphasized the importance of beautiful things. He maintained that it was by the experience of beauty that the human mind was turned from the world of change to that of realities immutable and eternal. This is borne out by Gadādhar's experience. A thing of beauty is a thing of joy to everybody. But the joy proceeding from it proves in most cases ineffective because of the impurity of the average mind. The effect is impaired and often completely destroyed by the animal impulses and evil propensities of the human mind. In any case, Gadādhar had a similar trance-experience on two other occasions when he was a mere boy.

At Anur, a village about two miles from Kamarpukur, there was the statue of a goddess called Bishālākshi. One day some women of Kamarpukur went to worship there. Gadādhar, beloved of all his neighbours, particularly of women, was persuaded to accompany the party. The hymns which they sang to the goddess on their way put him in a prayerful mood, and his mind was gradually so concentrated that he fell down unconscious in a trance. The women were in confusion. Their devotional attitude was broken and they forgot all about the goddess whom they had been hymning. They now turned to Gadādhar and did all they could to restore him to normal. But all was in vain. He still remained unconscious.

In the group there was a quick-witted pious lady, a widow of the aristocratic Lāhā family. She suggested that they should call Gadādhar in the name of the goddess Bishālākshi and they shouted her name into his ears. After a while, to their surprise and great relief he regained consciousness. They now pulled themselves together and proceeded again with enthusiasm towards Anur, where they worshipped the goddess in her temple with great devotion.

They then returned home and narrated the full story to Chandramani, who became more concerned than ever for her son.

Gadādhar went into a state of trance for a third time on a day of Śiva worship. A well-to-do family of Kamarpukur had arranged for the performance of a play about Lord Śiva. But the manager of the troupe sent word at the eleventh hour that they would be unable to give the performance because the person who was to act the part of Śiva had suddenly fallen ill. After much thinking and searching they chose Gadādhar. All were indeed agreed about him, and he for his part was glad of it.

Since Gadādhar was to act as Śiva in the play he was made up for the purpose. Śiva, though God Himself, was depicted in the Purāṇas as a sannyasin and a great yogi. The boy smeared his body with ashes, wore matted hair and a tiger's skin. Composing his mind in meditation he made his appearance on the stage. All were struck with his resemblance to Śiva Himself and praised him in superlative terms. But meditating upon himself as Śiva he became drowned in ecstasy and stood motionless. Some time passed. Two old men full of apprehension went up to him and clasped his hands. To their astonishment they found that his whole body was cold and inert and that he was unconscious. Unnerved they raised an alarm which put the whole congregation in confusion. Some began to shout, others sprinkled cold water on his head and began to fan him, thinking that he was in a fit. Some, on the other hand, wondered what had happened and were sorry that he had spoiled a good day's performance. Gadādhar however continued in the same state. All dispersed in disappointment, while the boy was carried home unconscious and nursed through the night. He did not recover consciousness until the following morning. Thus we see that ecstasy was frequent in Gadādhar even before his teens.

When Gadādhar was nine he was invested with the sacred thread, and another unusual event occurred. During the ceremony he resolved to receive the food-offering from a woman of a low caste whom he regarded as his god-mother. It was preposterous. He was the son of a pious Brahmin, and it was unthinkable that he should choose a low-caste woman as his god-mother, not to speak of taking cooked food from her hands. It created a sensation in the village. Gadādhar's relatives were perturbed. But he would not yield and in the end all including his elders had to accommodate themselves to his whim.

As we have mentioned above, Gadādhar was an artist in the true sense. He was also a good singer. When people heard him sing pastoral and other divine songs in his bewitching voice, they were charmed. It became a passion with the devout women of the village. At that time professional readers used to read aloud in public from the great Epics and the scriptures. Gadādhar made a point of attending and listened with rapt attention. One day he surprised all by reciting verbatim the discourse he had just heard. He often joined in the discussion among the pundits on religious and other problems.

On one occasion Gadādhar astonished everyone by suggesting a reasonable solution to a problem which some learned Brahmins were debating endlessly. It was on the day when rites for the dead were performed in the house of the Lāhās. On such occasions the learned guests were given a problem to debate, and the richest award was made to the best fighter. Gadādhar, now nine or ten years old, watched it all with keen interest. There was no end to the arguments. To the boy, however, the issue was clear, and he was bold enough to suggest the solution to the pundits who readily accepted it to the astonishment of all present. This showed not only that Gadādhar was a precocious boy, but that he was in a way far wiser than the scholars. Nevertheless, he was unmindful of study. He often loitered in lonely places and with his class-fellows worshipped gods and goddesses for fun. Sometimes again he acted short dramas with his friends in a corner of the nearby mango-grove in imitation of the religious plays they were privileged to watch.

Khudiram died when Gadādhar was only seven years old, and the poor family became poorer than ever. They were much concerned at his continued indifference to study. Obviously, there was an innate urge in him for spiritual life, which was quickened by his contact with the sannyasins whom he used to meet in the village rest-house on the road that led to Puri, a holy place to the Hindus. On the other hand, when pundits debated in public, they did so for the gifts they received from the rich who had invited them for the purpose. All this brought home to Gadādhar that learning was no good as it was a means of living and served no higher purpose.

Gadādhar was now sufficiently advanced but became more and more preoccupied with ideas that had no direct bearing upon worldly life. He could not be kept much longer at school. Moreover at the age of ten he would fall more frequently into a state of trance. And so his family ceased to put pressure upon him and left him more or less alone. In this way some years passed.

After the death of Khudiram the whole burden of maintaining the family had fallen upon Gadādhar's eldest brother, Ram Kumar. But the latter finding it hard to make both ends meet went to Calcutta in 1850 and started a Sanskrit school at Jhamapukur. Ram Kumar took Gadādhar with him with the idea that the new surroundings might change him.

Gadādhar had deep affection and respect for his brother and soon settled down to work under the latter's care and guidance. At sixteen he joined the school and began to study, but not for long. The thought of the results of secular education weighed upon his mind. His conviction that it could not lead to the realization of the ultimate end of human life was increasingly deepened. And at last he found himself unfit for the pursuit of learning. Ram Kumar discouraged and disconcerted looked for an occupation more suited to the boy's temperament and found him a place as the family priest of some wealthy neighbours in the vicinity.

At that time there lived at Janbazar in South Calcutta a famous rich lady named Rani Rashmani. Blessed with four daughters she had been widowed at the age of forty-four, thereby succeeding to the vast property of her husband. She was very intelligent and a great organizer. Within a short time by her skill and perseverance she made her inheritance a well-organized estate. She was not only dexterous in the management of worldly affairs, but was extremely kind-hearted and pious. Her love of God, moral courage, broad outlook and wide sympathy for the poor endeared her to all.

Rashmani was a devotee of Kāli, the World Mother, and her devotion to the Goddess marked all her activities. One night before starting on a pilgrimage to Banaras she had a strange dream. Kāli the Mother appeared to Rashmani in her sleep, told her that instead of visiting holy places she should build a temple on the bank of the Ganga. The pious lady could not dismiss it as a mere dream. Taking it as a divine message, she abandoned the idea of going to Banaras and bought twenty acres of land at Dakshineswar on the eastern bank of the Hooghly about four miles north of Calcutta. The project took ten years to complete and involved a vast outlay. Besides the Kāli temple there was one for Viṣṇu and a block of twelve for Śiva. The temple of Kāli, however, was the major one and She was the supreme Deity there.

Rashmani the great lover of the Goddess Kāli wanted cooked food to be offered daily to Her. But her inferiority complex filled her with misgivings. She never forgot that she belonged to a non-Brahmin caste. She, therefore, sought advice from some learned pundits, who all discouraged her. The caste-ridden Brahmins thought that the divine Mother should not partake of the food-offerings of a devotee who was born to a lower caste in society.[1] Rashmani was broken-hearted.

When Ram Kumar of the Sanskrit school at Jhamapukur was consulted he was able to solve the problem. Rashmani was overjoyed when at long last food was offered properly to the Deity in her new temple. Another problem now faced her. Dissatisfied with the work of her family priest she wanted a more pious Brahmin to take charge of the temple worship. Her choice fell upon Ram Kumar.

Ram Kumar had become notorious by authorizing a low-caste widow to offer food to Kāli the Mother. In doing so he was in advance of his time. He was afraid that acceptance of the position of priest at Dakshineswar might be going a little too far. However, after mature consideration he accepted the post, perhaps thinking that work in the temple was after all a divine service, a daily worship of the Goddess Kāli. As he was a great devotee, the question of caste did not appear important to him.

When the temple was formally opened Ram Kumar himself performed the puja. It was a great day marked by festivities and feastings. A large number of Brahmins from different parts of Bengal joined in the function, and each of them received liberal gifts. Gadādhar, of course, went with his brother, appreciated the service and enjoyed the gaiety of it all. But he was still very orthodox in the matter of food and drink and took nothing in the temple compound. He fasted until evening when he bought a pice of puffed rice as he was returning. The next morning, however, he went again to Dakshineswar partly out of curiosity and partly to see his brother at work. After a while he was given to understand that there was no chance of Ram Kumar returning home that day. He went back to Calcutta and waited there a week. But Ram Kumar did not return. Gadādhar was naturally perturbed. He again came to Dakshineswar and learnt that his brother had accepted the post of temple priest. This upset him still more. It was unthinkable for him that a good Brahmin should serve under a low-caste rich lady.

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[1] Swami Abhedananda in his *"Sayings of Ramakrishna"* (pp. 16-17) writes: "This beautiful temple was built by Rashmani, a pious Hindu lady of the caste of fisherman, in a beautiful garden measuring about twenty acres of land at an enormous cost of nine lacs of rupees." It should be noted in fairness to Rashmani that she did not belong to the caste of fisherman, although there is no denying that her caste was comparatively low.

Gadādhar tried his utmost to dissuade his brother from working in the temple. But it was all in vain. Ram Kumar had made up his mind and was convinced that his was a divine mission. Gadādhar remained with him, but he would not take even sacramental food from the temple, preferring to cook his own meal on the bank of the Ganga. His refusal to take cooked food from the temple area was due to an excessive sense of purity.

Ram Kumar gave Gadādhar a sound training in the technique of the different rites, especially of the worship of Kāli. He thought that his brother would in time succeed him as the temple priest. As no one without spiritual initiation was considered fit for the ritualistic worship of the Divine, Gadādhar was initiated in the Śākta cult by Kenaram Bhattacharyya, a Tāntric yogi of Calcutta. During the ceremony he fell into a trance. As Ram Kumar became older and less able to perform worship in the temple Gadādhar began to assist his brother in the discharge of his duties. This was good news to Rashmani and her son-in-law Mathur Babu, who had already been highly impressed by the qualities of Gadādhar, and who wished him to take over the temple duties. Ram Kumar gradually grew weaker and died in 1856. Gadādhar then became priest of the Kāli temple and was joined by his nephew Hriday who took charge of the Viṣṇu temple.

The acceptance of the post of temple priest at Dakshineswar opened a new chapter in Gadādhar's life. He became a different man, performing his duties with punctilious care. But he became increasingly inward. After his work in the temple he sang devotional songs of Ramprasad and Kamalakanta, two Tāntric devotees of Bengal, and remained merged in contemplation of the Mother. As his mind soared into the spiritual realm, he became indifferent to food and drink and lost his sleep. His nephew Hriday became much concerned.

At Dakshineswar there is a place now known as Panchavati where Gadādhar planted saplings of five sacred trees. Originally it was an uneven place covered by a jungle which was considered haunted. In the centre was a stout *amalaki* tree. Gadādhar used to go into the seclusion of the wood at night and meditate at the foot of the tree. Hriday thought, quite naturally, that there was something wrong with his uncle. So he tried to put fear into Gadādhar's heart by throwing stones towards him into the jungle and in other ways also. But it was to no purpose. One night Hriday himself took courage, went up to the *amalaki* tree and found, to his astonishment, his uncle seated in a yogic posture, naked and without the holy thread. No doubt was left in Hriday's mind that his uncle had gone mad. In his anxiety he asked for an explanation. Gadādhar lectured him in the dense jungle on the eight fetters—hatred, anxiety, the sense of shame, family pride, fear, caste-consciousness, superciliousness, and social conduct. He pointed out that when meditating on God one should be free in thought from these bonds, because they chain the mind to earthly life. Hriday was bewildered.

Gadādhar had started upon his spiritual career. As time went on divine frenzy would seize him. When worshipping the Mother in the temple he was tormented by the question whether her image was a dead piece of matter or whether behind it there lay a living Goddess. And the more he pondered the deeper he entered the inner world. Everything about him seemed rather absurd. He now took much longer time to complete the rites in the temple as he was not in himself. The people about him grew curious, and Rashmani and Mathur Babu were very anxious for him particularly in view of his faultless worship of the divine Mother.

Gadādhar's devotion and yearning for the Mother increased day by day. To him the whole world appeared as naught without a sight of the Mother. He became so God-intoxicated that he ate and slept little. His ceaseless meditation quickened the circulation of his blood and in consequence his breast became crimson. He prayed that a vision of Her be vouchsafed to him; for he was on fire, and could not live, without Her. But the World Mother held Herself back from him, and he came to the end of his patience. Thinking that life was worth nothing without the realization of the Deity, he decided in his agony to put an end to his life. In a moment of utter scepticism that the Mother would never come to him he rushed to a sword hanging on the temple wall. He had scarcely reached it when the divine Mother in Her resplendent form appeared before him. He was overwhelmed and lost consciousness. As he told his disciples later, he was drowned in an ocean of infinite bliss and unearthly light.

Ever since then the divine Mother in Her spiritual form became the constant companion and guide of Gadādhar. The stone-image in the temple became instinct with life, and the veil between matter and spirit disappeared. As a result of these ecstatic moods he became for a time unfit for his daily duties in the temple, but his nephew Hriday somehow managed to do the work. People now were certain that Gadādhar was suffering from a nervous break-down. Hriday, therefore, arranged for him to be treated by a great physician, but without any effect.

During this time Gadādhar had strange spiritual experience. As he sat to meditate he lost consciousness of his body and surroundings. First he saw myriads of light shining like glow-worms around him; then he became aware of a multitude of lights which, like an extensive fog, covered all sides. Then again he perceived waves of bright silver-white light over all things. He saw these phenomena when meditating with eyes closed, and even when they were open. Indeed a complete change came over him. It seemed that he was not in himself and that he belonged to a different world.

Gadādhar felt that the only thing real and worth seeing in the world was the bright blissful form of the divine Mother. Previously at the time of worship and meditation he had only a fragmentary experience of the Mother seeing first only Her hands, then only Her feet on a luminous lotus or again just her face beaming with a benign smile. He was now fully conscious of the whole shining body of the Mother by day and night. It was no longer a question of images and apparitions. For him the Goddess Herself was installed in the temple, and She lived, moved, ate and slept under the care of Her beloved son. The whole atmosphere of the place was changed, was surcharged with intense spiritual fervour. Hriday testified in his later life that at that time an unspeakably elevating mood descended, though temporarily, upon all who happened to be there.

Hriday often watched Gadādhar at his work in the temple, and found everything about his uncle to be surprisingly unusual. While performing the worship Gadādhar often got into an ecstatic mood and taking a handful of flowers and bael leaves offered them first to different parts of his own body and then to the feet of the Mother. He danced, sang, and caressed Her as if he was a boy before Her. He never slept. At night he talked to himself and to the Mother or went into the nearby wood to meditate. Hriday fearing that his poor uncle might lose his job tried to hush up the whole matter.

One day someone complained to the officers of Rashmani and they came to see what was happening. They found that Gadādhar was not carrying out his priestly duties correctly, but they felt disinclined to take action. There was something vaguely divine about his actions and they hesitated. On second thoughts, however, they decided that he was either insane or obsessed and that the temple rites were not being properly performed. They reported accordingly to Rashmani and Mathur Babu.

Mathur Babu sent word to his men at Dakshineswar that he would himself come and investigate, warning them not to interfere with the priest in the mean time. In the temple precincts speculation was rife, and some were secretly delighted that Gadādhar would soon be driven out. On arrival Mathur watched the priest worshipping Kāli in the temple. He saw that Gadādhar was in a state of ecstasy and oblivious of others. He was doing his usual work in a divine way. He was serving the Mother just like a boy, now singing and dancing in ineffable joy, now going into an inert state, and again talking to the Mother as if She stood face to face with him.

No shred of doubt was left in Mathur Babu's mind that Gadādhar had reached a high stage of realization. He felt supremely blessed that by this devotion the image of the Mother had become a living presence. He said no word to anyone, but left and later issued orders that Gadādhar should have his own way in worshipping the Mother.

At this period Gadādhar lost control and felt that he was only an instrument in the hands of the Mother. Ecstatic moods constantly came upon him in spite of himself. He was being drawn up the ladder of realization, and new vistas were gradually being opened up to him. But this caused a severe strain upon his body and mind. His ecstasies and experiences were far too deep for his frame to endure and in consequence he suffered from an incessant burning sensation all over his body. Later he told how, when sitting at Panchavati, a person black as ebony with blood-shot eyes suddenly emerged with drunken lurches from his body. A moment later, however, a serene figure dressed in saffron clothes with a trident in his hand also came out of his body and killed the other outright. It was a mysterious phenomenon. Afterwards Gadādhar ceased to have a burning sensation all over, but it was not long before the ailment returned.

Mathur Babu had told Rashmani all he knew about their priest. Coming one day to the temple and attending the worship, she was thrilled to see Gadādhar's genuine devotion and his state of ecstasy. She sat down before the temple to say her prayers and to meditate. After a while Gadādhar rushed agitatedly towards her, saying "Here too you think of all that" and slapped her mildly on the face as if chastising an erring daughter. It was extraordinary for the temple priest to punish his mistress, and the event created a sensation in the garden house. The people were staggered at the priest's audacity. Rashmani however saw her fault when she was roused by the slap out of her reverie. The fact was that she was involved in a law-suit which was weighing upon her mind day and night. And as she sat down to meditate she simply span out details about the law-suit. She wondered how Gadādhar could know her mind and was overpowered with the sense that he, an employee of hers as he was, was in a way far superior to her. She appreciated his act and spoke out to all present, who were apparently satisfied with her explanation.

As the days rolled by Gadādhar became more and more subject to ecstatic fits. He often lost consciousness and people were afraid that he might fall into the Ganga or into a fire. Mathur Babu himself was full of apprehension about Gadādhar and was convinced that the latter was suffering from neurosis. His conviction was deepened by the old report of Gadādhar's unseemly conduct in the temple. He put his priest under the treatment of Kaviraj Gangaprasad Sen, a renowned physician of Calcutta. At the same time he appointed Ram Tarak Chattopadhyaya, Gadādhar's cousin, priest of the Viṣṇu temple in the place of Hriday who took his uncle's place in the Kāli temple. It is well to note here that Ram Tarak was nicknamed Haladhāri by Gadādhar.

Mathur Babu did not stop at this. He tried to heal Gadādhar by argument, attempting to show that God Himself kept the laws that operate in Nature. Gadādhar to whom God was omnipotent was perturbed by Mathur Babu's statement. He complained to the Mother and asked whether it was correct to say that She Herself was subject to laws.

One day after having taken his bath in the Ganga when he was mounting the steps of the bathing ghat he saw on a China-rose plant two flowers on the same stem, one of which was red and the other white. He was overjoyed. He plucked the flowers and gave them to Mathur Babu, who really was dumbfounded by the phenomenon.

Mathur Babu now suspected that Gadādhar was suffering from sex-repression, and sent for some prostitutes. But Gadādhar was not in the least disturbed by the presence and amorous gestures of the damsels. Instead he went into a trance, and Mathur Babu's suspicion was allayed once and for all.

Haladhāri, on the other hand, was very hard upon Gadādhar, who by that time had reached a very high state of spiritual realization. An overwhelming sense of the unity of the world had come upon him. He often ate crums left over by the beggars who were fed daily in the garden house. He would often visit the pariahs who were his neighbours and cleanse their privies, even wiping them with his hair to ensure that he had conquered disgust. All this was outrageous to Haladhāri. He too came to the conclusion that Gadādhar was insane, and ridiculed Kāli by saying that She was a Goddess of an evil nature, of death and destruction, and that Her worship was not worth while. Haladhāri was a learned pundit. He warned Gadādhar that as he had lost his caste by indiscriminate eating he would have difficulty in marrying his children.

The idea of being a father was repellent to Gadādhar as he had already transcended sex. He protested and pointed out how absurd was it for a pundit to say that the world was an illusion and at the same time to become the father of children. Haladhāri however did not understand what Gadādhar meant. The latter was in a state of absolute dispassion and detachment and saw no distinction between earth and wealth. His sense of unity with his surroundings was consummate and for him there was no difference between the scent of sandal wood and the stench of stool.

News that Gadādhar was ill and had left his post at Dakshineswar reached Kamarpukur. His mother and brother Rameswar were much concerned. They brought him home and grew very anxious when they found him crying day and night "Mother, Mother". That was in 1859. Gadādhar's relatives did their utmost for him. They tried different kinds of medicine and even resorted to magic rites and exorcism. In any event, from that moment Gadādhar's frenzy abated a little and at length he became normal again. This was probably because the vision of the World Mother had become at that time somewhat fixed in him. His relatives heaved a sigh of relief.

They still thought that the abnormality from which he suffered might have been due to sex and thus proved Freudians before the birth of Freud. Deciding to arrange for Gadādhar to be married, they looked for a suitable bride. Gadādhar however did not deviate from his path. On the fields to the west and north-west of Kamarpukur there were two cremation grounds called "Bhutirkhal" and "Budhai Moḍal." By day and night he loitered there alone and fed the jackals and spirits who roamed these places and were visible to him. All this shows that Gadādhar was for the time being at least poised in blissful visions of the Mother and was thus free from fear and other human frailties.

Gadādhar's relatives continued with their plan. At first his mother kept it a secret that they were arranging for his marriage lest he should turn against it. When, however, he learned of it, instead of opposing, surprisingly he gave his consent to it. But a suitable bride could not be found and this became a serious matter with the family. Strange to say, he himself came to their help. One day in a meditative mood he told them that his bride was waiting for him in the house of one Ram Chandra Mukhopadhyaya of Jayrambati, a village a little distance from Kamarpukur. They, however, did not take his words seriously thinking it was his way of ridiculing the idea of marriage. His mother and brother nevertheless secretly sent someone to enquire there. And they were astonished when they were informed that Ram Chandra really had a daughter who was only five years old. Chandramani after much consideration settled that she should marry Gadādhar to this girl. On an auspicious day in 1859 Gadādhar was married to Ram Chandra's daughter Saradamani with proper rites and ceremonies. Chandramani was exceedingly delighted that Gadādhar started upon worldly life.

After his marriage Gadādhar stayed at Kamarpukur for about one year and seven months. Certainly his mother prevented him leaving home for fear of a relapse of his ailment. Nevertheless in time Gadādhar returned to Dakshineswar and resumed his duties in the temple. Within a few days he was again a changed man. He became so absorbed in worship and meditation of the Goddess that he forgot all about Kamarpukur, his mother, brother and wife. His mind remained concentrated upon the divine Mother with the same result as before. His breast took a scarlet hue, he would not sleep and a burning sensation spread all over his body. Mathur Babu sent him again to Kaviraj Gangaprasad Sen for treatment. But it was all to no effect. On one occasion a physician of East Bengal who was visiting Gangaprasad examined Gadādhar and heard the full story about him. Being something of a yogi he told Hriday that Gadādhar's illness was divine frenzy. For the next six years Gadādhar had no sleep ; his eyelids stayed rigidly open and his eyes became glazed like those of a fish. Totally indifferent to his body he was sustained by visions of the blissful Mother.

During this period Mathur Babu had a strange experience. One day from a little distance he watched Gadādhar pacing up and down the corridor outside his room. When Gadādhar turned his face towards Mathur Babu the latter saw not the priest, but the divine Mother in Her glorious form, and, when again he turned his back to Mathur Babu the latter saw not Gadādhar, but Lord Śiva. Mathur was overpowered by these visions. The veil before his eyes was lifted, he knew who Gadādhar was and fell at his feet shedding tears of joy. Mathur was indeed transformed. From then on he dedicated himself to the service of the humble priest.

Now let us turn to another scene. Rashmani fell dangerously ill in 1861. She still preferred to live in her Calcutta house, but her condition grew worse. When her end was near she was brought down on the holy Ganga, and was blessed with a vision of the Mother. That night some bright lights were placed around her. Suddenly she cried out, "Away with these lights. My Mother is come illuminating all sides." With these words the great devout lady breathed her last. Mathur now took upon himself the management of her estate. And he was quite sure that, if Gadādhar was mad, he was so for God, not for any earthly gain whatever.

A little time after the death of Rashmani an important event took place at Dakshineswar. Gadādhar was plucking flowers by the bathing-ghat when a country boat drew up there. Out of it stepped a female figure in saffron clothes with dishevelled hair. She was evidently a Vairabi—a Tāntric nun. She was about forty years old and still full of beauty and grace. She came up the steps of the bathing-ghat with a spiritual halo around her head. Gadādhar watched her and felt irresistibly attracted by her soothing personality as if she was intimately known to him. At his instance Hriday conducted her to his uncle's room. As soon as she saw Gadādhar she was overwhelmed with joy and wonder, and with tearful eyes said to him, "You are here! I have been looking for you so long."

Gadādhar could not at first understand what she meant. She told him that she had been divinely commissioned to meet certain yogis, two of whom she had already encountered in East Bengal. She was delighted to have found the third in Gadādhar. He, therefore, opened his mind to her as if he was her beloved son. He told her the story of his life and how he had been suffering from an unbearable burning sensation all over his body. The Vairabi listened with close attention. She reassured him that he had never suffered from a disease in the ordinary sense of the word. She explained that his bodily and mental troubles were the signs of the highest ecstasy that he had attained. Such signs, she went on, had appeared in Sri Rādhā of Brindāvan and in Sri Chaitanya of Nadia, the greatest of the devotees of the past. She gave an account of the different kinds of Bhakti.

On the day of her arrival at Dakshineswar the Vairabi took some food from the temple store and cooked a meal for her God, Raghuvira (Sri Rāma). She then offered the food to Him and went into deep meditation. She was instantly merged in bliss and tears of devotion rolled down her cheeks. At that moment Gadādhar fell into a semi-conscious state and was drawn towards the place where the Vairabi was worshipping. Under a divine spell, so to speak, he began to eat the food offered to Raghuvira. After a while the Vairabi opened her eyes and felt supremely blessed to see that her inner experience squared with what was happening in front of her. When, however, the divine frenzy left Gadādhar he said apologetically, "Mother, I cannot quite see why I do such a thing in a state of self-forgetfulness." The Vairabi assured him that her whole spiritual career was crowned by that day's unique experience and realization. She then ate whatever was left of the offering as a sacrament. Having realized her God, Raghuvira, in Gadādhar she sank His image in the holy Ganga because she no longer had any use for it.

The Vairabi certainly found a living God in Gadādhar. Vastly learned in religious lore she wanted to serve him in all possible ways. She often read out to him passages from the scriptures which explain the signs of an Incarnation. In this way she spent six or seven days at Dakshineswar. By her activities she created an intensely spiritual atmosphere in the garden house. But it occurred to Gadādhar that it was not proper to keep her long in the temple area. Fearing that evil-minded persons might whisper about her, he arranged for her residence at Devamandal a little way off from Dakshineswar. She was well received by the owners of the house there as they were great lovers of God.

The Vairabi now came daily for a few hours to talk on spiritual matters with Gadādhar. She observed that he, like any Incarnation of the past, could transmit spiritual powers to others and his symptoms of so-called bodily and mental troubles were the signs of an Incarnation. Her spiritual experience on the day of her arrival at Dakshineswar, and her study of the relevant scriptural texts and the behaviour of Gadādhar convinced her that he was God Himself in flesh. And she spoke out her mind to him.

On one occasion in the course of conversation Gadādhar told Mathur what the Vairabi thought about him. Mathur however laughed it away, saying "There are after all ten Avataras (Incarnations). How can the Vairabi's statement, however well-intentioned, be true? It is at any rate beyond question that the grace of the divine Mother has descended upon you." At that moment the Vairabi was coming in with a plate of sweets, and Gadādhar said to her, "O Mother, I have told him what you said about me the other day. But, according to him, there are only ten Avataras." On being introduced to the Vairabi, Mathur paid his respects to her. She asked him: "Why only ten, as many as twenty-four Incarnations are mentioned in the *Bhāgavata*? Sri Vyāsa also says that the Incarnations of God are innumerable. In the Vaiṣṇava scriptures there is a clear mention of the second coming of Sri Chaitanya." Mathur found it difficult to reply and remained silent.

The Vairabi's view about Gadādhar soon spread and created a stir in the garden house. She requested Mathur to assemble at Dakshineswar the great pundits of the time to discuss whether Gadādhar was an Incarnation. Mathur accordingly invited some renowned Sanskritists, and amongst those who came were Vaiṣṇava Charan—a great Vaiṣṇava scholar and devotee and Gouri Pandit—a Tāntric devotee of Birbhum. The Vairabi in her masterly way expounded her view of the temple priest with the help of copious quotations from the scriptures, especially from Vaiṣṇava literature. By comparing the characteristics of an Incarnation as recorded therein with the signs and symptoms she had observed in Gadādhar, she sought to prove that the latter was a new Incarnation of God. Vaiṣṇava Charan defended her thesis. The atmosphere in the temple garden now cleared. The verdict of the pundits had a great effect upon the minds of the people there. Instead of regarding Gadādhar as a lunatic, they developed an attitude of respect, even of reverence towards him. Mathur simply marvelled at his priest.

As has been indicated above, the Vairabi found in the so-called ailment of Gadādhar all the nineteen signs (weeping, laughing, dancing, fainting, etc.) of the highest state of ecstatic love of God. As laid down in the devotional scriptures, she made Gadādhar wear a garland of fragrant flowers and smeared him with sandal paste. And within a short time he was cured of the protracted burning sensation. But this was only a preparation for higher realization. Indeed the Vairabi was convinced, though she did not always remember, that Gadādhar was an Incarnation. She was still too human and allowed her human feelings to overpower her. She was now very eager to convey to her spiritual son the fruits of her lifelong realization. Being a Tāntric yogi, she wanted Gadādhar to attain the Tāntric realization of God.

Tāntricism is a form of religion which dates back to the distant past. But historians differ about its origin. According to some, Tāntricism proceeded from the Veda, particularly from the Rig-Vedic hymns to the Devi. Others say that it was an offshoot of decadent Buddhism in the early centuries of the Christian era. Some see in it a deification of the female principle or an apotheosis of mechanical energy, while sceptics dismiss it as magic. But these views are based on a misunderstanding of the main principles of Tantra.

Tāntricism represents an aspect of Indian theism which at some pre-Christian period arose out of a ferment of philosophico-religious ideas and practices, Aryan and non-Aryan.

It is a religion which was built upon the conception or realization of the supreme Being as both transcendent and immanent. Illusionism or acosmism did not find favour with Tāntriks. Their scriptures show that the world is real in the reality of the supreme Being who creates and sustains it. According to them, the ultimate reality is indeed infinite and eternal, but is not to be conceived as the Absolute beyond this world. The Tāntric conception of the Supreme, in short, effects a synthesis of the conception of the Absolute and that of the World Creator.

In this scheme the supreme Being is a dynamic spiritual Personality with an impersonal aspect called Śiva, the personal aspect being Kāli the Creator. The latter creates the world and ordains it in its minutest details, but is not exhausted by so doing. The Creator in creating retains the transcendent aspect intact. But this is no dualism. Tāntricism is essentially monistic in the sense that the ultimate reality is one. However, though the supreme Being as transcendent is incomprehensible, yet the Creation proceeds out of the infinite Being. This conception is, I think, common to some other schools of Indian theism.

There is a novelty in the Tāntric discipline. In it the supreme Being is conceived and sought to be realized in the form of a mother, though strictly there is no sex in Reality. The word "mother" symbolizes creativity itself as well as purest love. It is little wonder that the Tāntriks prefer to call the supreme Being the World Mother who creates out of Herself things and beings which again She engulfs. The realization of all values and the attainment by man of the highest possible knowledge and power are in the gift of the Mother. We should therefore turn from our egoism to Her and seek Her grace, which alone can lead us to the state of perfect bliss.

Tāntricism, like Buddhism, probably started as a ramification of the yogic culture of ancient India and in the course of time assimilated ideas and practices from other cults. Indeed, as has been indicated above, some distinctive currents of spiritual culture met together in the mystical cult now known as Tāntricism. Tāntriks in their own way in fact evolved an esoteric technique of worship with which to attain union with the World Mother. They acquired through their yogic experience knowledge of the subtlest parts of the human body and their function.

According to them, at six different points along the spinal cord from its base near the cortex to the forehead, there are six nerve-centres each of which is to be thought of as a lotus. In and through the spinal cord there runs a very subtle nerve called *Suṣumnā*. This nerve, flanked by two others—the *Iḍā* and the *Pingalā,* starts in the lowest nerve-plexus and in its highest reach terminates in the brain which is regarded as the seat of a thousand-petalled lotus—the *Sahasrāra*. In the middle the *Suṣumnā* pierces various nerve-centres, the lowest of which is called Ādhāra and is situated between the anus and the genital organ. A little higher up there is the second centre called *Swādhiṣṭhāna* just against the genital organ. Still higher up by the navel is the third called *Maṇipūr,* whereas the fourth—*Anāhata* lies next the heart in the spinal column. The fifth and sixth nerve-centres are located behind the throat and the forehead respectively.

We are told that the primal divine energy called *Kuṇḍalinī* which makes for union with the Deity sleeps in an individual steeped in ignorance. Final spiritual realization only occurs with the help of this energy after it has been awakened. According to the Tāntriks, therefore, the first effort of the aspirant must be directed to rousing the primal energy which lies coiled in the lotus in the lowest part of the spinal cord. Spiritual consummation thus consists in rousing the *Kuṇḍalinī* and making it penetrate the upper lotuses. The progress of the *Kuṇḍalinī* through the *Suṣumnā* marks the progress of the aspirant in his spiritual life, and the highest state, that of trance, is reached when the *Kuṇḍalinī* merges in the cerebrum.

Tāntriks start with the ordinary way of life and proceed by gradually transforming mind and body through an arduous discipline till they reach and realize the divine Mother. Their realization and experiences show that the World Mother reveals Herself to Her devotees in many spiritual forms, the chief among which are: Kāli, Tārā. Soḍasi, Bhubaneswari, Vairabi, Chinnamastā, Kamalā, Bagalāmukhi, Dhumāvati, and Mātangi. These ten forms of the Mother centre round the formless core of Her being. Tāntric experiences and realization were clothed in words, syllables and signs which acquired a mystical potency in the sense that they could quicken spiritual fervour in an aspirant and speed up his moral and spiritual progress. Tāntricism in its developed form was a phase of the renaissance of Hinduism at the post-Buddhist period. It is not too much to say that Tāntric ideas and technique of worship later permeated the socio-religious life of the Hindus.

No wonder then that the Vairabi being a Tāntric yogi wanted to guide Gadādhar in these modes of worship and realization. Under her guidance he practised the different forms of worship and meditation as laid down in the sixty-four Tantras. To her surprise it took him only three days to attain to realization by one definite path.

Varied indeed were Gadādhar's experience ; he realized all the ten special forms of the Mother with their divine glories. We are told that during this period he lost consciousness of the body and became indifferent to everything empirical. His body, however, became divinely beautiful. He resembled a celestial being, and people were irresistibly attracted by him. They came crowding to see him, and he was liable to be mobbed if he stirred out of the garden house. When Gadādhar regained his bodily consciousness and saw that his resplendent appearance had caused such excitement, he fervently prayed to the Mother that She might draw back the uncommon beauty from his person. This prayer was immediately fulfilled.

Gadādhar's thirst for diversity of spiritual experience was not yet quenched. He now experimented with the Vaiṣṇava methods of realization. Vaiṣṇavas for their part did not reject ordinary human life, but divinized common human love in its different forms. This love can be considered broadly under five heads: *Sānta, dāsya, sakhya, vātsalya,* and *madhur*. *Sānta* means filial piety and *dāsya* the love of a servant towards his master, while the last three indicate friendship, parental and conjugal love respectively. The Vaiṣṇava saints realized God in terms of these human relationships. They developed different attitudes to God according as they thought of Him as father, master, friend, child or husband. Vaiṣṇavas maintain, and rightly, that the last-mentioned relationship marks the consummation of human love. It is indeed in conjugal love that complete unity between two individuals is attained. No wonder therefore that in Vaiṣṇavism the highest form of worship and realization consists in conceiving God as the beloved husband and enjoying Him as such.

In this form of worship there is no question of sex. In it only the ideal core of the conjugal relationship is fixed on and made a lever for spiritual uplift. This core is to be found in the urge of the lovers concerned to identify themselves with each other in all respects. Perfect conjugal love involves constant thought of the beloved and utter self-forgetfulness on the part of the lovers. Now God is all pure and all perfect. Hence if an aspirant thinks of God as husband in the gross sense of the word, the mere fact of constantly contemplating on God purifies him and frees him absolutely from the idea of sex. The Vaiṣṇava approach to God was most human. As they found, it was not easy for man to clear his mind of its innate ideas and his heart of its native impulses. With them there was no need to dehumanize man for the sake of spiritual life. So in Vaiṣṇava religion the ordinary major relationships which involve the different forms of love are simply switched over to God. But there is a stage of realization still higher than that of conjugal love, a state of ecstasy called Mahābhāva which is beyond the reach of an ordinary aspirant.[2]

Gadādhar now more or less followed these different modes of worship and achieved the relevant realization. He was particularly interested in *dāsya, vātsalya* and *madhur*. Hanumana the great devotee of Sri Rāma was the most perfect embodiment of the servant-master relationship. He dedicated his all—body, mind and heart—to the service of Rāmachandra. During his sādhanā according to *dāsya,* Gadādhar was so overwhelmed with the thought of Hanumana that he in his ways became a Hanumana.[3]

Again when Gadādhar practised the idea of God as the Bridegroom he thought himself to be one of the milk-maids of Brindāvan, who were ideal devotees. And a wonderful change came over him in his talk, gait and dress. His overpowering female-idea had some visible effects even upon his body.

Nanda and his wife, Yasoda, of Brindāvan were perfect in their attitude to God as a child. Their parental affection for the supreme Being kept them in blissful communion with Him. Gadādhar practised this attitude as well. While he was worshipping in this way a saint named Jatādhāri came to Dakshineswar. He was a devotee of *vātsalya.* He looked upon Sri Rāma as a divine child and carried with him an image of the God. He served it as if he was its father. This impressed Gadādhar very much and endeared Jatādhāri to him. Jatādhāri was very fortunate ; he was now vouchsafed visions of his chosen God, constantly experiencing the effulgent spiritual form of Sri Rāma. It is well to note that Gadādhar was initiated into the *vātsalya* form of worship by Jatādhāri and that Sri Rāma—Raghuvira was Gadādhar's family Deity. Now under the guidance of this new *guru*

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[2] Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami: *Sri Chaitanya Charitāmrita,* ed. by Bhudhar Chattopadhyaya, Part II, p. 88, Calcutta, 1303 B.S. ; Sachinandan Vidyanidhi: *Ujjvala Chandrikā* (in Bengali), ed. by Kuladaprasad Mallik and Sibratan Mitra, pp. 137-150, Santiniketan, 1333 B.S.

[3] Hanumana, I think, belonged to an aboriginal tribe of South India. He is unfortunately depicted as a monkey in the Rāmāyana.

(teacher) he attained to realization along this path in a very short time. He was blessed with experience of the divine form of the child Rāma.

The Vairabi was an adept in the Vaiṣṇava cults as well as being a Tāntrik. She helped Gadādhar in his Vaiṣṇava practices. He had already achieved union with the Divine Mother. Now if he wanted to follow and practise the different cults, it was simply because he was seized with a yearning to realize the infinite Mother in Her manifold aspects. After having achieved Vaiṣṇava realization Gadādhar felt inclined towards the Vedāntic realization of the Supreme. By this time his old mother had come to live with him, but his cousin Haladhāri had left being replaced by his nephew Akshay who had taken over the charge of the Kāli temple. Gadādhar was in a very high state. He was completely transformed and was only a tool in the hands of the World Mother.

Some time in 1865 a Vedāntic saint called Totāpuri came on a pilgrimage to Bengal. After long years of austerity and meditation he had attained to the absolute samādhi, as it is called, the highest state of *Brahman*-realization according to Vedānta. He came to Dakshineswar in the hope of meeting Gadādhar. When they met they were for the moment lost in mutual admiration.

Totāpuri was a tall and stout figure with matted hair. He was naked as he had renounced all things. At the first glance Totā perceived that Gadādhar was fit for Vedāntic realization. He said, "Well, are you willing to practise Vedānta?" Gadādhar at that time, as we have seen, was not himself; he had surrendered his all, even his will, to Kāli the Mother. Naturally then he answered by saying "I do not know what to do or what not to do. I shall do so if my Mother commands me." Totā snapped out, "Then go and ask your Mother."

Gadādhar stepped slowly towards the temple and stood before the statue of Kāli the Mother in a meditative mood. He heard Her say, "Go ye to the sannyasin and learn; he is come for your sake". Gadādhar was overjoyed. He came back to Totā and informed him accordingly.

Totā, though highly impressed by Gadādhar's childlike simplicity, regarded his attitude to the Goddess as mere superstition. According to Absolutist Vedānta, God the personal is phenomenal, the ultimate Being being wholly indeterminate, impersonal and formless. Totā was amused by the crudity, as he thought, of Gadādhar's ideas. Nevertheless he decided to initiate the priest in Vedānta. The latter was to renounce all earthly possessions and worldly goods and become a sannyasin. But he asked that it be kept secret lest the news should give his old mother a rude shock. Totā, therefore, arranged to initiate him to absolute renunciation secretly at Panchavati.

The auspicious moment at last arrived. Gadādhar performed the preliminary rites and surrendered himself to Totā who was now his teacher. The latter told him to sink into the deepest self which was knowledge absolute and nothing else. But the luminous form of the divine Mother came in Gadādhar's way. When he concentrated his mind upon the supreme formless Being he simply saw Her. Totā was annoyed. He picked up a piece of glass, marked with it the point between Gadādhar's eye-brows and commanded him to fix his mind there. Gadādhar did so and was in a moment plunged into a deep trance. That was the highest trance-state in which he realized *Brahman* which is existence-knowledge-bliss absolute. Totā was astonished to find that the priest had achieved in one day what had taken for him forty years. Gadādhar remained in samādhi for three days and nights. Totā observed that his disciple's face was serene and bright, but there was no sign of life in his body. He decided that he was in *nirvikalpa samādhi,* the highest spiritual realization according to Absolutist Vedānta. Totā now tried to bring his disciple back to normal consciousness and performed successfully some rites for the purpose. When Gadādhar came out of his absolute trance-state an altogether new outlook opened for him. The things and beings of the world appeared as manifestations of the Supreme, and there was in him an efflorescence of divine powers.

Totā gave Gadādhar a new name, Ramakrishna, by which the latter is now known. He became much attached to him and stayed with him for some eleven months. After his departure from Dakshineswar Ramakrishna again rose to *nirvikalpa samādhi*. We are told that if a yogi in this highest state continues for more than twenty-one days he will die. Gadādhar however remained in it continuously for six months. Strangely during this critical period of his life a wandering saint came to Dakshineswar and dedicated himself to the service of Ramakrishna, whom he forced to eat a little food and thus helped to keep him alive.

Some time later Ramakrishna felt an urge to realize God by the way of Islam. At that time a Sufi saint called Gobinda came accidentally to Dakshineswar. His presence afforded Ramakrishna an opportunity to fulfil his desire. He was initiated into Islam by Gobinda and in due course achieved the Islamic realization of God. During this sādhanā Ramakrishna observed the Islamic discipline to its minutest details and practised the religion with all his heart. When doing so he forgot about the Hindu gods and goddesses, even the divine Mother. He did not go to the temple to say his prayers but kept away, practising the daily round of *namaz* and meditation on Allah as described in the Holy Korān. Within three days he reached the goal of the Islamic Faith, attaining to the realization of a luminous person with a long beard and a face deep and serene. Immediately after this he again plunged into the ecstatic experience of the Indeterminate and Impersonal. When he returned to normal he had once more an overwhelming sense of the unity of the world. He felt his identity with every thing and being in the world.

In the mean time Ramakrishna was suffering from liver trouble. Finding his condition a little better Mathur sent him home with the idea that a change might help him to recover. Ramakrishna thus arrived at Kamarpukur with the

Vairabi and his nephew Hriday some time in 1867. His relatives were delighted to see him back. They found nothing absurd about him. To them he was much the same man except that there was an unspeakable glamour about him. His wife, Saradamani, now about fourteen years old, came to join him.

Even when surrounded by relatives, friends and worldly people Ramakrishna was not disturbed in his blissful state. One day some women neighbours came to sit before him, and he fell into a trance. Most of the visitors in their ignorance noisily discussed his state. One of them, however, was more spiritually advanced. She asked her companions to keep quiet lest the noise they were making should disturb Ramakrishna in his ecstasy. She realized or was made to realize that he was drowned in the ocean of supreme bliss. When he came down to the empirical plane he openly testified that the pious lady's statement was true.

Now Ramakrishna was alive to his duties by his wife. It was imperative with him to lift her to his level, and he instructed her accordingly. He effected a real change in her and she soon became aligned to his ideal. The Vairabi however disliked Ramakrishna reaching his wife. She was afraid that the resulting intimacy would affect his continence. It seems that her conviction that Ramakrishna was an Incarnation had in some way become blurred, and she could never realize that he had already transcended sex. At all events Ramakrishna remained at Kamarpukur for some time, then the Vairabi left for Banaras, and he returned to Dakshineswar in 1868.

Mathur Babu had long wanted to visit various holy places. He now set out with his family, Ramakrishna, Hriday and some others. They stopped at Deoghar to worship Lord Śiva in the famous temple there. Ramakrishna however noticed a number of ill-fed and ill-clad people and was overpowered with their suffering. In his sympathy for them he made Mathur feed them and give them each a piece of cloth. From Deoghar they proceeded to North India and visited Banaras, Allahabad and Brindāvan. As a result Ramakrishna met several great devotees; chief among them was Trailanga Swami, the master yogi of Banaras. The Swami used to live near the Manikarnika Ghat on the Ganga and observed the vow of absolute silence. He, therefore, paid his respects to Ramakrishna by gestures, and the latter said to Hriday, "All the signs of perfection are visible in this yogi; he looks as if he is Lord Śiva Himself." Once Ramakrishna brought the Swami to Mathur's house and fed him with his own hands with rice cooked in milk.

While at Brindāvan Ramakrishna went to visit the historic Gobardhan Hill. As soon as he reached it he got into an ecstatic mood and ran to the top. Gobardhan was considered holy, and no one was allowed to set foot on it. But the priests in charge could not prevent Ramakrishna as he was overpowered by the thought that Brindāvan was the place where Sri Krişņa had spent his boyhood. The Vairabi came to see her disciple and was with him during his stay there. After having spent nearly four months in travel Mathur with his whole party returned to Calcutta.

Hriday was a constant companion of Ramakrishna who watched his career closely. When his wife died he felt an urge for spiritual life and begged for a share of Ramakrishna's realization. The latter tried to impress on him that service was the best way for him. But Hriday was importunate. Ramakrishna at length yielded and said, "You will reach that state if the Mother pleases." Then one day as Hriday was performing worship he saw bright forms of gods and goddesses and was half-plunged in a blissful state. On another occasion when following Ramakrishna to Panchavati he had a wonderful experience. Ramakrishna—or so he thought—was no longer a being of flesh and blood; his body seemed a ball of celestial light illuminating the whole place, and his feet did not touch the ground. At first Hriday was at a loss to understand what had happened and later he lost control and cried out, "O Ramakrishna, you are no man. Why are you here?" Ramakrishna fearing that

Hriday's shrieks might alarm people asked him to be quiet. But Hriday was not himself. Ramakrishna came up and touched his breast, saying "O Mother, make this fellow inert." And in a moment Hriday's ecstasy was gone. He did not know what he had lost, but it could not be helped. Ramakrishna explained that a little experience was too much for him and had upset him, but that he would again have spiritual visions in the fullness of time.

In the autumn of 1869 Hriday wished to worship the Goddess Durgā (the World Mother) at his village home, and wanted to take his uncle with him. But Mathur not wanting to part from Ramakrishna would not agree to the latter going. Ramakrishna nevertheless told Hriday that on the occasion of the worship he would be there in his subtle body. On the first night of the four-day ceremony Hriday, to his surprise, saw Ramakrishna in a glorious form standing by the image of the Goddess.

Mathur on one occasion took Ramakrishna to his village home at Satkhira. The latter with Hriday went on an elephant, while Mathur preferred a palanquin. On their return an event of great significance took place. A society of devotees called the Harisabhā used to meet at the house of Kalinath Datta of Colootola in Calcutta and Ramakrishna was invited to attend. At these meetings a place was laid, according to the local custom, for Lord Gouranga (Sri Chaitanya), where the devotees offered their worship. Ramakrishna on his arrival went into a state of ecstasy, occupied the place laid for the Lord and remained there for a considerable time in a posture of intense devotion. The whole assembly was convulsed. Some were annoyed; for to them it seemed preposterous that a man should have taken the seat meant for God. Others were seized with vague admiration for Ramakrishna and the rest were staggered by him.

In 1871 Ramakrishna went to visit Nabadwip, the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya. He was taken round the town and its suburbs which were the scenes of Sri Chaitanya's life and activities. But he did not feel any ecstasy there. He did, however, fall into a trance when the boat by which he was crossing the Ganga came near the bank on which Nabadwip stands. Later when he was asked about this he said that his ecstatic mood showed that the actual birthplace of Sri Chaitanya was now submerged in the Ganga.

For years Mathur followed Ramakrishna as his shadow and served him to his utmost capacity. One day when ill with a boil he touched Ramakrishna's feet in agony and asked for blessing. The latter thereupon went into a trance. Mathur then kissed his feet and was filled with joy. Later, however, he fell ill of a fever which proved fatal on July 16, 1872.

Things at Dakshineswar went on much the same after Mathur's death. As has been mentioned above, Saradamani was only fourteen years old when she met her husband Ramakrishna at Kamarpukur for the first time after their marriage. Her contact with the divine man had revolutionized her inner being and filled her mind with heavenly bliss. As she grew up she often heard the people in her village talk about her husband. They would call him insane and describe in her hearing how he often went naked. The village women for their part jeered at her as the wife of a lunatic. Now that she was eighteen this was too much for her. She wondered if her husband really had turned mad. She resolved on the first opportunity to go to Dakshineswar to see with her own eyes the condition of Ramakrishna.

The birthday of Sri Chaitanya fell on the full-moon day of the spring month of Falgun, when many pilgrims came from far and near to bathe in the Ganga. Some of Saradamani's relatives intended to go to Calcutta for the same purpose, and she wanted to go with them. Her father Ram Chandra came to know of it and arranged to take her to Calcutta.

On the appointed day the pilgrims set forth from Jayrambati on foot as there was no railway there at that time. Saradamani walked with her father through the rice fields.

She could not go far as an attack of fever came on. Ram Chandra in his anxiety took his sick daughter to a nearby inn where her agony was much relieved by a mysterious experience. As she narrated it later to some of her women devotees, when her temperature ran high and she was almost unconscious she saw a lady of great beauty, though black as ebony, sitting by her. The lady massaged her with a touch so soothing that her fever subsided. Saradamani in her curiosity asked: "Who are you, and where are you from?" The lady replied that she had come from Dakshineswar to help her and was her sister. Saradamani then fell fast asleep and the next morning her temperature was normal. They continued on their way and reached Dakshineswar at nine that night.

Ramakrishna was glad to see his young wife, but was anxious when he learned of the fever. He said, "You come after quite a long time. My Mathur Babu is no more. I wonder who can take care of you here." Saradamani now saw that there was nothing wrong with her husband and that he was much the same as when she had last seen him at Kamarpukur. In any case she settled down at Dakshineswar and devoted herself to the service of the Goddess and of her old mother-in-law who was still there.

The relationship between Ramakrishna and Saradamani was mysterious. On the surface they were husband and wife, but both had gone beyond sex. One day Saradamani said to her husband, "What do you think of me?" He replied that she was the divine Mother Herself, who is worshipped in the temple.

On the new-moon day in the month of May, 1873, Ramakrishna arranged for a special worship of Kāli the Mother in his room. Hriday helped his uncle by collecting the necessary things. Ramakrishna had asked Saradamani to be present at the worship, and when she came he sat down to perform the puja. As Saradamani watched the rites she was seized with intense devotion. He poured sacred water on her head and directed her to occupy the seat laid for the divine Mother. She, by that time only half-conscious, did so without objecting. He thereupon worshipped her as the visible form of Soḍasi, one of the ten chief spiritual forms of the World Mother.

During the worship Saradamani transcended her normal consciousness and rose into a superconscious state of absolute bliss. Ramakrishna too gradually passed into the same state. Both the worshipper and the worshipped were now plunged into samādhi. The distinction between them is obliterated in their overall realization of the fundamental unity.

Saradamani stayed at Dakshineswar some time serving her husband and mother-in-law with all her heart. But she was disturbed by Ramakrishna's constant samādhi. One night when as usual she came to his room to sleep, she found no sign of life in him. Suspecting the worst she ran for help to Hriday who came and shouted the name of the Goddess into Ramakrishna's ears until at length he regained normal consciousness. After that Saradamani slept with her mother-in-law. In this way she spent about one year and four months at Dakshineswar, after which she returned to Kamarpukur.

That Saradamani was living, like Ramakrishna, on a very high level of spirituality is shown by an event which reads like a legend. She was returning on foot to Dakshineswar with some of her relatives and neighbours. The sun set when they were approaching the village of Arambag. As they did not want to spend the night there, they trudged on in the dark. Saradamani however was tired and unable to keep up with her companions, who stopped and waited for her. Realizing that they were uneasy for her she asked them to go straight on and wait at Tarakeswar. She walked on alone behind them in comparative ease.

Seeing a black tall figure coming through the darkness, she wondered who it might be. A voice rang out, "Who are you and why are you here at this hour of the night?" Saradamani looked up and found that a strongly-built man stood before her. She answered spontaneously, "O papa, I have been left behind by my friends and have lost my way. I count upon your help. Your son-in-law lives at the Kāli temple of Dakshineswar, he will be glad if you go there." Behind him she saw a woman whom she supposed rightly to be his wife. Saradamani clasped her hand, saying "O mammy, I am your daughter Sarada; I have lost my way."

In those days the road from Arambag to Tarakeswar passed through a stretch of country infested with dacoits. The couple were members of this band. Strangely instead of harming Sarada they did their best to help her. They took her to a small shop and arranged for her stay there for the night. The woman made a little bed of her own clothes for Sarada, gave her some sugared puffed rice to eat, and then with her husband watched over her as she slept the night through. At day-break they all three left for Tarakeswar. On arrival the woman cooked a wholesome meal and made Sarada eat her fill. There Saradamani's companions found her. But tears rose to their eyes when the dacoit couple prepared to take their leave. Saradamani too was moved with emotion. Incomprehensively a touch and a few short words had worked wonders with the two bandits, who had become so attached to Saradamani that they promised to visit her at Dakshineswar. And later they did so bringing presents of sweetmeats. It was a wonderful thing—two dacoits transformed by meeting the divine woman.

Now to revert to Ramakrishna. After the worship of Soḍasi in the person of Saradamani his urge for sādhanā was for the time fulfilled. Later, however, he took up a new form of devotion. Sambhu Mallik of Calcutta used to read the Bible to him. He now wished to realize the Mother according to the path prescribed in the Bible. Just to the south of Rashmani's garden house there was another owned by Jadu Mallik, which Ramakrishna used occasionally to visit. Jadu and his mother were devoted to him and missed no opportunity of taking him to their drawing room to rest.

On the wall hung a picture of the Virgin Mary with the child Jesus in her arms.

Ramakrishna was much attracted by this picture. He began to meditate on the story of Jesus, and as he continued the picture became instinct with life. Both Madonna and child became for him two luminous figures. For some time he was so engrossed in Christ and his teaching that he forgot the forms of worship he had previously practised as well as the Hindu gods and goddesses. He felt disinclined to enter the temple and see the divine Mother. On the third day of this state when pacing up and down at Panchavati Ramakrishna had a unique experience. He saw a person with fair complexion and large broad eyes approaching him, the face aglow with celestial beauty. As he wondered who this might be he heard a voice say: "Jesus Christ who suffered a sea of anguish to save mankind." The divine man then drew near, embraced Ramakrishna and merged into him. He was overwhelmed and fell into an ecstatic trance. This marked the end of the long period of Ramakrishna's sādhanā.[4]

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[4] Practice of yoga.

CHAPTER IV

RAMAKRISHNA—A MODERN INCARNATION OF GOD (Continued)

In the Tāntric religion three main forms of worship are prescribed, the ordinary, the heroic, and the divine. The ordinary way is one of restraint and control and is meant for the average man. The aspirant avoids the tumult and temptations of ordinary life. Subduing his evil impulses and instincts he meditates on the divine Mother in a secluded place.

The second way, as its name indicates, does not reject but embraces ordinary life. Its followers remain in the hurry and bustle of life but seek to escape from their lower impulses. In it the aspirant looks upon a woman as his wife but he does so only to transcend the conception through sādhanā. He is considered a hero as he does not flee life, but makes it the basis of his spiritual development.

The third form of worship is the highest in the hierarchy. It is suitable only for those who are spiritually advanced or in whom there is an intense innate yearning for God-realization. Those who follow the divine way have already mastered their lower nature and enjoy spiritual bliss. The aspirant who has thus realized God finds that he has become a teacher. He then helps others to attain to this state.

As we have seen, Ramakrishna not only reached the peak of Tāntric realization, but also realized the Divine in other ways as prescribed by different religions and sects. No wonder, then, that he now appeared in the rôle of a spiritual teacher. Ramakrishna had, of course, manifested the teacher in him sporadically on more than one occasion both in his boyhood and during the period of his sādhanā. He did not set himself up as a teacher and guide to the lovers of God until after his many-sided realization. As he said of his state at that time, the lotus had blossomed and bees were coming to it from far and near. Events at Dakshineswar then took a new turn. Men and women, old and young, saints and sannyasins came streaming to Dakshineswar to enjoy the nectar that fell from the lips of the poor Brahmin of the Kāli temple. Numbers who came were too vast to describe. I will nevertheless attempt to convey some idea of the major events of this period of Ramakrishna's life.

As we have seen, Ramakrishna had two great spiritual guides—the Vairabi and Totāpuri. The former, of course, was well advanced in her spiritual life, but apparently she had not yet attained to the consummate state of realization. This was made clear by her later dealing with Ramakrishna. When Totā came to Dakshineswar and urged him to try for Vedāntic realization, the Vairabi was full of misgivings. She was afraid that her disciple would lose his fervent love of God under the influence of arid Absolutism.

Ramakrishna once went to his village-home in company with the Vairabi and his nephew Hriday. His girl wife was then there, and he considered it his duty to instruct and influence her. The Vairabi however resented this. She cautioned him lest he lose his high state by intimacy with his wife. Then she was spiritually proud. Some of Ramakrishna's neighbours would sit round him and question him about God and other things. But she did not like this. She did not scruple to say to them "It is no good asking him any question about God. What does he know? He is my creature." We may recall here that the Vairabi was the first to recognize Ramakrishna as an Incarnation of God and declared him to be so in public. Later, however, her spiritual egoism got the upper hand and clouded her vision. After a time, however, she saw her mistake and became conscious of her imperfection. She then took leave of Ramakrishna and left Kamarpukur for Banaras to practise meditation.

Once at dead of night Totā made a fire near Panchavati and settled down preparatory to meditation. Immediately a tall naked figure stepped towards him. Totā was a great yogi and absolutely free from fear; he asked: "Who are you? What brings you here?" The reply came: "I am a spirit named Bhairab. I live on the nearby tree and am in charge of this holy place." Totā said, "Well and good, you, I and the rest of the world are manifestations of *Brahman*. Come, let us meditate together." The figure, however, did not respond, but melted away into the air. On the following morning Totā narrated the whole incident to Ramakrishna, who testified that there was a Bhairab on the tree whom he often encountered. Ramakrishna added that the spirit had made a prediction which came true. Mathur Babu had to sue a company which wanted to acquire the whole temple area. One day when the case was pending the Bhairab from his tree hinted to Ramakrishna that Mathur would win the suit. And he did so.

Once Ramakrishna found Totā scouring his water-pot. Asked why he did so the latter replied that the pot must be rubbed daily lest it grow mouldy. Ramakrishna added bluntly "What, if the water-pot is of gold?" Totā was so embarrassed that he would not answer. On another occasion someone took a live charcoal from Totā's fire to light his *hookah*—a sacrilege which visibly angered the sannyasin. Ramakrishna was present and asked his teacher how he could be so inconsistent. According to Absolutist Vedānta, *Brahman* alone is real and the world with its contents is an illusion. If so, anger in one who has attained to Vedāntic realization is not understandable.

One evening Ramakrishna was silently repeating the name of the Lord while clapping his hands. Totā was surprised that he should still adhere to a theistic form of worship, even after his realization of the Absolute. He, therefore, ridiculed Ramakrishna by asking "Well, what are you doing? Are you making bread?" The latter did not say one word to his spiritual guide. Some time later Totā fell ill with dysentery. He was a Vedāntist, and, according to him, the body was illusory. So also was pain. He in fact often rose above bodily consciousness through meditation, but he could not be in a trance all time. He had to return to normal existence and the excruciating pain. His condition grew worse until it became unbearable. He was too weak to meditate, still less to rise into trance. But he was not absolutely helpless. Convinced that the body was illusory he wanted to get rid of the illusion. And so one night when all were asleep he stepped into the Ganga. But that night the water was only knee-deep for Totā. Instead of drowning he waded across, although the river was in fact deep enough for a large ship to sink. He was baulked and completely nonplussed. Suddenly a new consciousness came upon him ; he had the feeling that there was some one far superior to Vedānta and Vedāntic knowledge. He was vouchsafed a vision of the World Mother and was overwhelmed with the sense that there is a divine Ordainer of the universe. Totā emerged from the Ganga a new man. The next morning Ramakrishna found the staunch advocate of Absolutism transformed into a great lover of God. From now on, instead of cavilling at Ramakrishna's prayer to the Mother, Totā himself would enter the temple to worship and pray. Indeed it was a miracle.

As we have seen, Mathur Babu once arranged for a public discussion in the grounds of the Kāli temple at Dakshineswar. The principal speakers were Gouri Pandit and Vaiṣṇava Charan, a devout Vaiṣṇava who was a devotee of Sri Kriṣṇa. Seeing Vaiṣṇava Charan seated in the assembly in a meditational posture Ramakrishna, in a state of semi-trance, climbed up and sat astride his neck. The whole gathering was bewildered. The victim, however, was plunged into a vision and began reciting aloud a Sanskrit prayer-poem to God. Gouri, on the other hand, did not take much part in the conference, but when asked by Ramakrishna what he thought, he replied that his questioner was he from whom an Incarnation proceeded. At that Ramakrishna exclaimed "Good Heavens" and told Gouri that he went a step further than Vaiṣṇava Charan who looked upon Ramakrishna as an

Incarnation. Gouri further averred that one can only recognize an Incarnation through divine grace.

Gouri was a Tāntrik and had a wonderful way of performing sacrificial rites. He would pile a maund of sacrificial wood on his outstretched left hand, set fire to the wood and pour ghee over it. This is no legend as Ramakrishna himself bore witness to it. It seems that as a Tāntric mystic he may have acquired miraculous powers. As a result, however, of meeting Ramakrishna a complete change came over him. Abandoning the pursuit of psychic powers, he hungered after spiritual realization and made up his mind to renounce the world. One day he touched Ramakrishna's feet, begged for his blessing and left Dakshineswar. He was never seen or heard of again.

Seekers after Truth came to Dakshineswar in a continuous stream. Some were nuns and mendicants, but most came to be initiated by Ramakrishna. Among them was Narayan Sastri, a great pundit of Rajputana, who stayed for some time at Dakshineswar. One day Madhusudan the Bengali poet and barrister came to consult the temple authorities about a law-suit concerning Rashmani's estate. When, however, he learnt that there was a saint there he wanted to see and talk to him. Ramakrishna was informed, but was mysteriously shy of meeting a Christian. He asked Madhusudan through Narayan Sastri what made him change his religion. The pathetic answer was: "Well, Sir, only for a living." The idea that one could embrace a faith as a means of livelihood seemed absurd to Ramakrishna. When asked by Madhusudan for spiritual instruction he stood tongue-tied. He wanted to speak, but felt as if someone was pressing his tongue hard to prevent him from talking.

Narayan Sastri was inspired and initiated by Ramakrishna, who gave him a mystic formula for meditation. According to Tantra, there are three kinds of initiation, Māntrī, Sāktī, and Sāmbhabī, graded according to the different stages of the spiritual development of the *guru* and the disciple. The first is meant for the neophyte, the second for one who is a little advanced in spiritual life, while the third represents a stage where the teacher imparts spirituality to the disciple directly by touch. Ramakrishna chose the form suited to the stage of development of the aspirant concerned. Narayan later left Dakshineswar and renounced the world to practise meditation.

Pandit Padmalochan was a great Sanskrit scholar. An adept in Nyāya he had received his classical education at Banaras, and was one of those who adorned the court of the Maharaja of Burdwan. He had also studied Vedānta and was a devout soul. When living near Calcutta he chanced to meet Ramakrishna. He was ill at that time, but said that as soon as he recovered he would tell people that Ramakrishna was an Incarnation.

In the course of his tour of India Dayānanda, the founder of the Ārya Samāj, stayed in the garden house near Dakshineswar. He had already started a religious movement and earned for himself country-wide fame as a reformer. Now Ramakrishna delighted in visiting anyone interested in religion and God. He went therefore to the nearby garden house to see Dayānanda who was a great Vedic scholar and spoke in Sanskrit. Ramakrishna could not therefore speak with him and there is no record of an interpreter having been present. Years later Ramakrishna told his disciples that Dayānanda was possessed of some spiritual power. But, as he pointed out, Dayānanda had a passion for the spectacular which led him to make great play with scriptural texts in virtue of his mastery of Sanskrit grammar.

We have noticed in the previous chapter that Ramakrishna accompanied Mathur Babu and his wife on their pilgrimage to holy places. Throughout the tour he went into ecstatic trances, especially at Banaras, Brindāvan, and Mathura, thus testifying to their sacred association. During this journey he met some saints and devotees, chief among whom were Trailanga Swami of Banaras and Ganga Mai of Brindāvan. The latter was a very pious lady and great devotee. She took Ramakrishna to her cottage and served him with all her heart and soul. She felt blessed that she saw God Himself in flesh.

At Kalna in the district of Burdwan there was a renowned Vaiṣṇava saint called Bhagavan Das Babaji who was really spiritually advanced and had some mystic powers. When Ramakrishna went to see him, and was approaching his ashram Babaji felt that some great soul was coming and got ready to receive him. They met and talked on spiritual matters. Hriday, who was with his uncle, became inquisitive when Babaji started telling his beads. He asked him: "Well, Babaji (master), if you have already reached perfection, why then do you keep these beads?" The sharp retort came: "For the education of the people." On this Ramakrishna joined issue and in his characteristic way tried to curb Babaji's spiritual egoism. He pointed out that there was only one Ordainer of the universe, God, and that, while most men were steeped in ignorance, even those who had attained to spiritual illumination were no real agents as all agency belonged to God. In Ramakrishna's opinion even souls possessed of perfection were but tools in His hands. Babaji appreciated the ideas Ramakrishna expounded. They then had a free and cordial exchange of feelings.

As we have mentioned before, when the Vairabi first met Ramakrishna she told him that she had already had two disciples in East Bengal. They were Chandra and Girija. Chandra had acquired the power of becoming invisible. But unfortunately his spiritual development was not commensurate with his psychic power. He yielded to the sex-impulse and soon found himself in a state of degradation. When he fell in love with the daughter of a rich man, he used his power to enter the house of his beloved without being noticed by anybody. But in the end he lost it and became a wreck of his former self. Girija, on the other hand, found his way to Dakshineswar and stayed with Ramakrishna for some time. He too possessed some mysterious powers. One evening Ramakrishna went with him to a neighbouring garden house. It was dark when they were to return and Ramakrishna had difficulty in finding the way. Girija said, "Brother, wait a bit. I shall arrange for light." He then turned round and a bright pencil of light shot from his back and illuminated the whole path. But he did not keep these powers for long. Ramakrishna saw that they were the obstacles to his spiritual progress. Through his influence Girija was relieved of them.

Keshab Chandra Sen was a great religious leader of the time. His spiritual fervour and genuine devotion changed the face of the Brāhmo Samāj. Ramakrishna heard of this and felt an urge to see him. The occasion of their first meeting, which had taken place some time before, was as follows. Ramakrishna in company with Mathur Babu called on Devendranath Tagore, who had the reputation of being a great devotee. Devendranath was delighted with his guests and treated them with respect. And he found something unusual about Ramakrishna who examined his breast and talked about God and love of God. Tagore being impressed by his guest invited him to the anniversary of the Brāhmo Samāj, but asked him to come properly dressed. Ramakrishna replied that he could not give the assurance as he could not afford to be particular about dress and diet. This gave Tagore pause. The next morning he wrote to Mathur Babu cancelling the invitation. He was afraid that Ramakrishna with his scanty clothing would be a misfit in the genteel society. Ramakrishna however was invited to another meeting of the Samāj which he described thus: "Many years back I went to the Ādi Brāhmo Samāj, where I saw everyone sitting silent with his eyes closed. But it appeared to me that internally they were all militant. Seeing Keshab I found that his float had sunk." Ramakrishna meant that of all assembled there Keshab was the most advanced in meditation.

Now to revert to Ramakrishna's visit to Keshab in March 1875. With Hriday, his constant companion, he left Dakshineswar in a hackney carriage for Keshab's house at Colootola. But Keshab had gone away with some of his disciples to the garden house of Joy Gopal Sen at Belghoria.

On being told of this Ramakrishna went straight to Belghoria. Keshab with his disciples was sitting on the steps of the garden tank before bathing. The hackney carriage entered the garden and stopped near the steps. Hriday got down and said to Keshab, "My uncle likes to hear about God ; he often goes into samādhi due to intense divine intoxication. He has come to hear you speak about God." And instantly a bright slim figure emerged from the carriage. Hriday introduced Ramakrishna to Keshab and his followers. Ramakrishna was wearing a single piece of red-bordered cloth one end of which was round his shoulders. At first Keshab did not take him seriously. Ramakrishna however said, "I have heard that you have been having God-visions and I would like to know their nature." Thus a conversation started. But it was interrupted when Ramakrishna sang a song of Ramprasad, the famous eighteenth-century Tāntric mystic. In the course of singing Ramakrishna went into samādhi (ecstatic trance). Hriday began to shout the mystic syllable "Om" into his uncle's ears. After a while Ramakrishna regained his normal consciousness and with a smile began to talk on high spiritual themes as if he was inspired. At first they all thought that he was acting. But now they were struck by the personality of the new comer. Keshab and his friends simply listened. They felt that there was something wonderful about the man. Ramakrishna had reached Belghoria at about 8 or 9 in the morning and his presence upset the whole arrangement there. Keshab and his disciples, charmed by his words, forgot about their bath and meal. And it was afternoon when he left.

Ramakrishna had gone hunting and bagged his game. He left a deep impression upon Keshab, who now felt irresistibly attracted towards him. He told Keshab that the latter had shed his tail, meaning that he was in a developed state of spirituality. Tadpoles, as we know, live in water, but as they grow their tails fall off and they sprout legs. They then move about freely on land or in the water. Ramakrishna meant that Keshab was an adult in spiritual life and that there was no need for him to renounce the world.

After this meeting Keshab used to come to Dakshineswar to enjoy the pleasure of Ramakrishna's company. He would bring his disciples and they would all join in the devotional music. Ramakrishna himself was a very good singer and often in his ecstasy sang in his silvery sweet voice the enchanting songs of Ramprasad. In this way Keshab and Ramakrishna grew very intimate. Ramakrishna often went to Keshab's house and to the Brāhmo Samāj to see him. On more than one occasion he started from the temple and arrived at the Samāj when Keshab was delivering a sermon. The latter on sight of the saint stopped short and came down to receive him. Such was his regard for Ramakrishna. Many in the Samāj were under the impression that the latter was one of them, and they were not far wrong at that.

One day Keshab came to Ramakrishna, who asked him to go to the temple and pray to the Mother. Keshab was disinclined to do so. He was a Brāhmo, and one of the cardinal tenets of Brāhmoism was that God was without form, though He possessed divine attributes as the Creator and Ordainer of the universe. So he told Ramakrishna that he had already given his all, his heart and soul, to the divine Father. Ramakrishna replied with a question, "Well, on whose milk was your body nourished in your infancy?" He pointed out that a child only approaches its father through its mother. Keshab was convinced but he could not yet quite understand what Ramakrishna meant by the word "mother". So he asked: "Whom do you call the mother? What is she like?" Now Keshab had been to England, so Ramakrishna said, "Why do you ask me this? Haven't you seen the vast sea and the limitless sky?" And he continued, "*Brahman* is like the vast sea and the Mother is like the waves surging on it. The Mother is the divine Creative Force. But there is no *Brahman* apart from the Creative Force, there is no *Brahman* devoid of creation. The Mother is *Brahman* itself in eternal Creativity."

Keshab was a Brāhmo, he considered it a superstition to worship God in images ; the Infinite, in his opinion, could not be compressed into an image. He asked: "Why, Sir, do you worship God the Infinite in the shape of an image?" Ramakrishna tried to bring home to Keshab's mind that the Infinite appeared small to the aspirant because it was far away from him, just as the sun appears to man as a disc because it is millions of miles away from the earth. Ramakrishna urged him to realize God as the Mother and uttered the name of the Mother into his ear.[1] From that moment Keshab was completely changed. His devotional nature was now in full bloom, and he was blessed with visions of the divine Mother. He was full of the Mother, and even in his sermons and discourses in the Samāj he dwelt upon Her and his experiences of Her glories. The world around him became illuminated by the light of Her spiritual form. He was drowned in unspeakable bliss.

In the mean time Keshab was faced with a crisis in his Samāj. The original Society had been split into two groups over the differences between Devendranath and Keshab. At the cost of repetition, the Samāj of Devendranath was called the Ādi Brāhmo Samāj, while the new Society of which Keshab was head came to be known as the Sādhāran Brāhmo Samāj. A split now threatened this new organization itself. In 1878 Keshab gave away his daughter in marriage to the native Prince of Cooch Behar. The bride had not attained the age which the Samāj approved for marriage. In the case of his daughter Keshab ignored one of the central principles laid down by the Samāj under his leadership. This raised a storm against him. When the differences between him and his followers came to a head, Keshab thought it advisable to leave the Sādhāran Brāhmo Samāj and found yet another Society for himself and his supporters.

On February 1, 1880 Keshab announced in the *Sunday Mirror*, "Let our readers accept the cheering message. A new dispensation has come down upon the Brāhmo Samāj which proclaims a new programme to India. Its chief merit is its freshness, and its one watchword is God, the Mother of India. . . . . All its changes are rung upon that single word, God-Mother." Keshab had conceived of a revival in the Samāj the year before. Referring to this his biographer, Pratap Mozoomdar, says, "When therefore Kshab spoke of a Revival in 1879, he meant a further advance, a greater advance, than had been made before, on the lines of a new revelation, a new life, altogether a new departure." The marriage of Keshab's daughter increased his differences with the Sādhāran Brāhmo Samāj. But there is no denying that he had already become pro-Hindu and pro-Christian. And this bias in his mind, if it was a bias, could only be explained by his intense devotional urge. His passionate soul was chafing under the much-too-intellectual religion of the Samāj. He was hungering for spiritual realization. That was why he was attracted so much by the teaching of Jesus Christ and Sri Chaitanya. Who can deny that his yearning for God-vision was fulfilled through the grace of Ramakrishna? After meeting the latter a new vista opened up before Keshab. So his spiritual break with the Samāj had taken place long before the New Dispensation came into existence. The Cooch Behar marriage was the direct cause of the new development in the Samāj, but the real reason lay in Dakshineswar. Personal differences and rivalries could bring about a new Samāj, but scarcely a religion with a new content.

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[1] *Vide* Akshay Kumar Sen: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* (in Bengali), third impression, pp. 236-238.

The differences between Devendranath and Keshab broke the Brāhmo Samāj founded by Ram Mohan into two Societies each of which continued to look upon the Brāhmo Trust Deed as the supreme sacred authority. But there was no appreciable difference in doctrine between the two groups. They were simply two organizations under the same religion. As Keshab himself declared, God the Mother was the centre of his new Church, which was founded upon his realization and experience of the Mother, not upon any dogmas. His Mother-idea, the devotional mode of worship adopted in his new Church, and his reversion to Hindu polytheism by way of a philosophical interpretation of it pointed to the wide gulf between him and the members of the Sādhāran Brāhmo Samāj.

One of Ramakrishna's chief disciples, who was often at Dakshineswar when Keshab was there, wrote thus: He (Keshab) would sit for hours at the feet of Ramakrishna and listen with rapture to the wonderful sayings on religion of that wonderful man. From time to time Ramakrishna would be lost in deep samādhi, and Keshab would gently touch his feet that he might thereby be purified. Sometimes he would invite Paramahansa to his house, or would take him in a boat for a few miles up and down the river. He then used to question him on some points of religion to clear away his doubts. Strong and deep love grew up between the two, and Keshab's whole life became changed, till, a few years later, he proclaimed his views of religion as the New Dispensation, which was nothing but a partial representation of the truths which Ramakrishna taught for a long time.[2]

On 27 October 1882, when Ramakrishna was talking to Bijoy Goswami of the Sādhāran Brāhmo Samāj, some of Keshab's disciples arrived to say that their master was in a pleasure steamer off the ghat and would like Paramahansa to join them. He agreed, but as he stepped into a rowing boat he fell into a trance. When the boat drew alongside the steamer the passengers crowded the gangway to see the Master. Keshab was very anxious that Ramakrishna should embark safely. The Master was brought out of his ecstatic state with difficulty, and to the relief of all, though still in a higher mood, he was sufficiently normal to reach a cabin on the upper deck. When he entered Keshab received him with due respect and devotion. But again Ramakrishna rose to samādhi.

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[2] A. K. Sen: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* (in Bengali), 3rd impression, pp. 253, 332, 431-432, Calcutta, 1356 B.S.; "M": *Kathāmrita,* Part V, Appendix A; Nikhilananda: *Gospel,* Appendix A; *Prabuddha Bhārata,* Sri Sri Ramakrishna Centenary Number, p. 97, Calcutta, 1936.

Bijoy Goswami was formerly a follower of Keshab, but they had separated after the establishment of the New Dispensation. Keshab, therefore, never expected to meet him on that occasion. However, they forgot their differences in the pleasure of Ramakrishna's company. All eyes were now fixed upon the face of Ramakrishna, and Keshab opened the windows to let in fresh air. And to the delight of all Ramakrishna began to come down from samādhi and to talk in his semi-conscious state to the Mother. Nilmadhab of Gazipur and a Brāhmo friend of his then began to talk about Powhari Baba, the well-known saint of Gazipur. They told Ramakrishna that Powhari had obtained one of his photographs and hung it in his room. Ramakrishna smilingly pointed to his body and said in a subdued, though audible, tone, "A pillow case." He meant that the photograph was a picture of the body which was but a case for the soul. He hinted that the body was of so little account that one should turn inward and seek to realize Him who was the Ruler of the universe.

Ramakrishna never allowed anybody to photograph him. This, therefore, could only be done when he was in samādhi and unconscious of his surroundings. In the words of Girish Chandra Sen, who was a staunch follower of Keshab, "He (Ramakrishna) never liked that his teaching be published, that any publicity be given about him in the papers or that he be photographed. Except when he was in a state of samādhi and lost to all outward consciousness, it was not possible to take a photo of him. In a state of samādhi he never fell on the ground unconscious, nor did he prove a nuisance to the people standing by his side by leaping and jumping. Sitting or standing he would become steady and motionless.[3]

On the steamer at first people opened subjects with Ramakrishna, but the latter soon took the initiative. He broke into a passionate discourse, and it seemed that in his ceaseless speech the fire burning within him flamed out. He touched on the whole gamut of man's spiritual needs and sought to convey what he could of his deepest experiences. The following are the highlights of his talk which was punctuated by singing melodious songs on the divine Mother.

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[3] *Prabuddha Bhārata,* Sri Sri Ramakrishna Centenary Number, p. 91, Calcutta, 1936.

The heart of the devotee is the temple of the Lord. There is one God, though He is called by different names and worshipped in different ways. The Vedāntist realizes God as the Absolute. For a devotee, however, God is the divine Person. Nevertheless God the Personal is identical with the divine Mother and with God the Absolute. All religions seek to reach one goal, that is, God. Yearning for Him is the beginning of true religion. To do good to others or to the world is a foolish idea. Who are we to do such a thing? We are not real agents ; the real and ultimate agent is God.

The divine Mother is there, and we are merely tools in Her hands. She creates, preserves and destroys the world, and as a destroyer She presides over Death. At the same time She stands before us ever ready to bless and preserve Her children. In another aspect She appears in Her spiritual form pleasing to Her devotees. She comes to them in Her blissful form, saying "Fear not." As a preserver She appears in times of plague, pestilence, famine and flood. She is seen at cremation grounds in the form of Death with corpses, jackals and spirits of destruction as Her companions. Streams of blood and a garland of severed hands round Her waist symbolize Her as the dreaded All-Destroyer. One should not think too much of sin as to do so makes one all the more sinful. One can only be purged of imperfection by constant meditation upon God the Mother.

Keshab's yacht cruised steadily down the Ganga, and it was night when it stopped at Koila Ghat. There was a full moon which made the city of Calcutta a pleasant sight. Ramakrishna appreciated and enjoyed it very much and returned home in a carriage.

Keshab had his own house called Lily Cottage on Circular Road and used to take Ramakrishna there. But he now fell seriously ill, and his relations and disciples were much concerned for him. Ramakrishna learnt of this and became anxious. Accompanied by some of his disciples he went to see Keshab, reaching Lily Cottage at about 5 o'clock in the afternoon of November 28, 1883. They were received by Keshab's friends and relatives and conducted upstairs where Ramakrishna took his seat in the corridor. Keshab was resting and as he was seriously ill nobody liked to disturb him.

As time passed, Ramakrishna became increasingly anxious, and wanted to go to the inner apartment to see Keshab whose disciples were obviously in a difficulty. One of them, however, had the presence of mind to begin talking to Ramakrishna in order to divert his mind. He said, "Sir, a great change has come over him (Keshab). Like yourself, he is often found talking to the divine Mother, hears Her voice and sometimes sheds tears." It was good news to the Master. On hearing it he immediately passed into samādhi. Evening came on and lights were brought to the drawing-room and corridor, but Ramakrishna went on talking to himself and the divine Mother. Noticing the chairs and tables he said, "These were useful, but now they are of little use." His hearers wondered at him talking like this.

By that time the room and the corridor were filled with Brāhmo devotees, and Ramakrishna unexpectedly burst into a sermon on the immortality of the soul. He said that the soul was not the same as the body and that it persists even when the body perishes. But no one quite grasped his drift. As we see it, he had a vision of the end of Keshab's earthly life and it was this that brought him that day to the house.

At last Keshab broken in health and emaciated came holding on to the wall into Ramakrishna's presence and fell down at his feet. But the Master was in a super-state and could not quite know that he had come. Keshab repeatedly said, "Here I am, Sir", but Ramakrishna made no response. Later he came down, although divine madness was still on him. In this state he dwelt in his characteristic way upon many themes from God the Absolute to the Brāhmo method of worship. He went on, "The Brāhmos pray like this: O Lord, Thou hast made the sun, the moon, and the stars, the beautiful flowers and their scent. Why do you detail all this? The world is indeed a vast beautiful garden, but which is the greater of the two—the garden or the gardener? One must seek the Lord the Gardener." It seemed that Ramakrishna forgot all about Keshab in his divine intoxication, though the latter was sitting before him. However, he now said with a smile, "You are ill; well, there is a deep meaning in this. There has passed through your body a deep devotional feeling searching the Lord . . . An elephant entering a hut soon makes it totter and and at last pulls it down. The love for the Lord is like the elephant in its greatness. It often pulls down the frail house called the human body. . . . You may think the Lord's will is done. But no, the physician does not leave the patient until he is perfectly cured. Your name has been entered in the hospital book and you cannot get away till you are seen cured by the physician in charge (the doctor sahib). Why did you suffer your name to be so entered?"

It was a fine figure of speech and laughter shook Keshab's fragile frame. Ramakrishna told him that ever since he had heard of his illness he was very concerned for him and that he prayed to the Mother making an offering of flowers and fruits to Her in Keshab's name for his recovery. Keshab's disciples might have felt jealous as Ramakrishna showed that he loved Keshab more than anybody else. He said, "The gardener knows how to deal with the common rose and also with specie roses. He clears the soil round the plant and its roots to give it the benefit of dew. This brings freshness and strength to the plant. Such is the case with you. The Gardener knows how to deal with you. He digs about you and to the very roots to open you to the dew of inspiration that would come upon you to make you thus purer and stronger than before."

Keshab's mother came to Ramakrishna and asked him to bless her son and pray to the Mother for his speedy recovery. Ramakrishna reassured her in his own way, saying "The child is dangerously ill and the physician knows not that it is the Lord that destroys and that no human power can save one who is destined to die." At this there was an uncanny silence on all sides. Later Keshab's eldest son was introduced to the saint. When asked to bless the boy he said that it was not given to him to bless and that it was for the divine Mother to do so. He caressed the child, while he talked to Keshab. His mission at Lily Cottage having been fulfilled the Master returned to the temple.

Keshab passed away on January 8, 1884 with the word "Mother" on his lips and presumably with a blissful vision of Her. Ramakrishna was overwhelmed and felt that he had lost part of himself.

Many of Keshab's disciples benefited by their contact with Ramakrishna, among them being Pratap Mozoomdar, Trailokya Sannyal who was known under the pen-name Chiranjib Sarma and was a good singer, Beni Pal of Sinti, Girish Chandra Sen, and Amrita Lal Bose. In addition Pandit Shivanath Sastri and Bijoy Goswami of the Sādhāran Brāhmo Samāj were very intimate with Ramakrishna. All these people often came to Dakshineswar to hear his words.

There is evidence that Bijoy Goswami was influenced by Ramakrishna far more than his friend Shivanath. He belonged to an orthodox Vaiṣṇava family whom he renounced with his religion and caste when he joined the Brāhmo Samāj in his youth. He was an ardent soul, a sincere seeker after God. Like Keshab, he grew tired of barren creeds and hankered after realization.

Bijoy, as he later told some of the disciples of Ramakrishna, had spiritual visions through the Master's grace. He was far advanced in spiritual life and eventually cut off all connection with the Brāhmo Samāj. At this Shivanath Sastri, leader of the Sādhāran Brāhmo Samāj, became alarmed about the future of his Society. He stopped going to Dakshineswar and gave as his reasons: "During the last few years of the saint's life, my visits became less frequent than they were before. Two causes contributed to produce the result. First, latterly, through his childlike simplicity he was drawn away by some of his new disciples into encouraging, by his visits and friendship, many objectionable characters such as the actors from the Indian stage. I did not like to be associated with such men.

"Secondly, during his last days, some of his new disciples began to preach him as God Almighty. I was afraid my meeting such men would give rise to unpleasant discussions. So I kept away."[4]

Ramakrishna told Mathur Babu that his many devotees were to come to Dakshineswar. Mathur had a high regard for him, took him at his word and himself vaguely waited for them. But when they did not turn up, Mathur became rather sceptical. Ramakrishna however reassured him that they would come in the fullness of time, but alas! Mathur was dead when they did so.

A little before the advent of his disciples Ramakrishna was often found on the roof of the temple house calling aloud to them. But how could they know that he was there at Dakshineswar? All lovers of God should be grateful to Keshab for bringing Ramakrishna to light. Since he knew the Master intimately he published sketches of the saint and articles on his teaching in the Brāhmo journals, such as the *Sulabh Samāchār*, the *Sunday Mirror*, and the *Theistic Quarterly Review*. These created a stir in the country. Those who had a real yearning for God and spiritual realization were irresistibly attracted towards Dakshineswar. And one by one quite a large number of devotees found their way to the Kāli temple.

Manomohan Mitra worked in Calcutta and lived with his family in a rented house there. His mother was a pious lady, and he himself was a devout soul. One night he retired as usual and was sleeping with his wife in the same bed.

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[4] Shivanath Sastri: *Men I have seen*, p. 121, Calcutta, 1919.

He dreamt that he was caught in a squall in the flooded countryside, the water was rising and washing away houses, men, beasts, and birds. A little ahead, however, he saw a stairway which rose from the flood waters to the sky. He thought of his wife, sons and daughters. Certain that they were lost, he was overwhelmed with grief and began to cry aloud calling their names. There was no reply, but someone suddenly appeared and told him that his family was drowned and the whole world under water.

Manomohan felt utterly desolate and in his agony was about to drown himself, but he heard a voice saying "Why should you die? The devotees of the Lord are still alive. You will meet with them soon." A moment later Manomohan awoke. But the line between the dream and the waking state was not yet clear to him. He looked at his wife and said rather excitedly, "Who are you?" On hearing the noise, Manomohan's mother rushed to his room, but he kept saying "My whole family is drowned. There remain only the Lord and His devotees. Where and how to find them out?" This experience convulsed his whole being, and its influence continued for two or three hours after dawn.

Later Manomohan told the dream to his cousin Ram Chandra Datta. Ram was a young man of fair complexion, tall, handsome and stoutly built. He was a chemist, a doctor and held a high post in the Calcutta Medical College. He was apparently much of an atheist and relished discussion of all sorts. One night he also had a peculiar dream-experience, but it was a nightmare. In it he saw that his only daughter was dead. His heart split with grief, tears drenched the pillow under his head. In his helplessness he was striking his forehead with his hands. At this stage he awoke, but was still weeping as he was overpowered by the thought of the death of his dearest child. A day later as he was pacing the roof of his house, he looked up at the blue sky and suddenly became restless. He could not account for the state and could not get out of it either. It appeared to be a hankering after something far too vague to grasp. He sought to remedy it by having scriptural texts read aloud, but to no purpose.

Ram Chandra and Manomohan joined together and tried to devise a way out of their common difficulty. Just then they came across an account of Ramakrishna's teaching together with a picture of him in some Brāhmo journal. Both were delighted. They had found a clue to the solution of their problem. They decided to go to Dakshineswar to see the saint. When they arrived the door of Ramakrishna's room was shut from the inside. They knocked gently and the door was opened. Ramakrishna in his kindness seated them beside him on the bed.

Ram and Manomohan were surprised that Ramakrishna appeared to be a matter-of-fact man without matted hair, ashes and a pair of tongs which were the usual marks of a sannyasin. The Master said to Hriday, "Look here, take care of these fellows. They do not belong to the Brāhmo Samāj." Manomohan interrupted, saying "Sir, we often go to the Samāj." Ramakrishna however told him not to worry as he was not one of the Brāhmos. He then spoke about God, Incarnation and the rest. Ram and Manomohan felt that they had at last found the man they were seeking.

The talk then turned to other things. Ramakrishna said to Ram, "Well, you are an adept in the science of the body. Can you tell me where our food goes to?" Ram touched Ramakrishna's abdomen. But Ramakrishna did not agree with him, saying that his stomach was situated on the extreme left in the lowest part of his abdomen. To verify this Ram tried a simple experiment. He examined Ramakrishna's abdomen as he drank a glass of water and found that the statement was true. Ram was astonished that there was something extraordinary even about the saint's bodily organs. Ramakrishna filled Ram and Manomohan with sweets and water when evening fell and they left. On their way back they talked about the strange man and his way towards them, and Ram wondered how the saint knew that he was a doctor.

Some time before Biswanath Upadhyaya, a Brahmin of Kanauj, who held a high post in the Nepalese army, dreamt that a saint was urging him to receive the knowledge of Truth. He never forgot the dream. Later by chance he came to Dakshineswar, and when he met Ramakrishna, he recognized him as the man who had thus appeared to him. Biswanath was overwhelmed and surrendered himself to the Master. This Brahmin devotee rose very high in his career in the army, and afterwards came down to Bengal as Nepal's Ambassador to India. He was known as the Captain among the disciples of Ramakrishna.

Now to return to Ram and Manomohan, one Sunday they came to Dakshineswar, and Ramakrishna received them with great affection. Ram asked: "Sir, if God exists, where does He live?" The Master replied, "We do not see the stars during day light. Can we then say that there are no stars in the sky? Further butter exists in milk. But we do not see it." Ram yearned for God-realization. He was assured that God-visions would come to him in time. Ramakrishna asked him to have patience like the angler seated in a corner of a tank with his hooked bait dipped into the water.

Ram with his cousin began practising religion—repeating the name of the Lord and reading the scriptures. On one occasion as he was studying the biography of Sri Chaitanya he had a vision of the latter. As Ram meditated on this figure it turned into that of Ramakrishna. Ram could not quite understand it all. On another occasion when he was watching the Master, the latter asked: "What do you see?" Ram replied, "I am seeing your blissful form. You are Sri Chaitanya himself." Ramakrishna then said that the Vairabi used to speak like that.

Ram in his later life was drowned in God-visions. Unlike an ordinary spiritual teacher, Ramakrishna, generally speaking, did not initiate anybody with a mystic formula. He did, however, give one to Ram in a dream, and Ram practised meditation with its help. He also occasionally brought Ramakrishna to his house and gave dinner parties to the devotees without distinction of caste and creed. At one such party there were two Muslim devotees, Abdul Oyazid being one of them. Ram's orthodox relatives objected to Moslems eating at the same table. Ram took no notice and told the objectors that devotees had no caste and that they were all one class. He had progressed in his spiritual life, but was not yet filled. One evening he happened to be at Dakshineswar and saw an unearthly light about the Master's body. Ramakrishna asked him to return the mystic formula that he had given him as it was no longer needed. Ram prostrated himself before the Master who set his right foot on Ram's head, and the latter lost normal consciousness. When he returned to himself, Ramakrishna said, "Fill yourself by seeing me." Ram reached his peak of realization.

Surendra Mitra was a young man of thirty. He was employed in an office in Calcutta on a monthly salary of three or four hundred rupees. He was well built and was given to drinking in conformity with the spirit of the time. He was nevertheless very simple-hearted. When he first heard of Ramakrishna he simply laughed. But he went on discussing the saint with his friends, though in a somewhat disparaging way. Then a change came over him. Filled with a blind sense of restlessness he became so unbalanced that he wanted to take poison. In spite of himself he was drawn irresistibly to Dakshineswar. Yet when he went there he still did not take Ramakrishna seriously.

Surendra sat down without giving the usual courtesy due to an elder. The Master, however, looked upon him with affection and talked about God and spiritual life. Surendra listened and began to feel transformed. He bowed down to Ramakrishna's feet and returned home. Being busy with office work he could not go very frequently to Dakshineswar. But whenever he felt an urge to visit Ramakrishna he saw visions of him in his room. One day Surendra suddenly had a yearning for the saint, but that day there was much work to do in the office. Leaving everything undone he went straight to Dakshineswar, and found to his surprise that Ramakrishna was about to start for Calcutta. The latter said, "It is good that you are come. I was to go to Calcutta for your sake." Surendra took him into his carriage and brought him to his house. He served Ramakrishna in every possible way and then sent him back to Dakshineswar.

Balaram Basu was a Vaiṣṇava devotee aged about forty with a slim figure, fair complexion, a long beard and a turban. He was rich, lived at Bagbazar in Calcutta and had an estate in Orissa. He was in Orissa when Keshab gave Ramakrishna publicity by his lectures and articles in the newspapers. Balaram became very anxious to go to Dakshineswar. The day he arrived was one on which Jadu Mallik, a wealthy devotee, arranged at Ramakrishna's request to give a puffed-rice (*muri*) feast. The name is perhaps a misnomer as rich dishes, sweets and curds were served as well. Keshab was fond of the puffed rice at Dakshineswar, so he had been invited, and was present. When the feast was over Ramakrishna out of affection for Keshab asked him to spend the night. The latter was unwilling and Ramakrishna chaffed him, saying "Look here. Once a fisherwoman could not get home from market owing to heavy rain, so she sheltered in the house of a gardener. But she could not sleep owing to the fragrance of the flowers around the house as she was not used to it. She had with her an empty fish basket in which, however, were a few scales. In her distress she sprinkled some water on the scales and made them emit a fishy smell. She sniffed it to her relief and fell fast asleep. Truly you have got your fish basket. You cannot sleep without your woman." The chaff was appreciated by all, most by Keshab, although he blushed as he listened to it. Balaram witnessed all this and was filled with joy. He returned home that night, of course, but he remained restless. Later, however, he came into intimate touch with Ramakrishna and through his grace was blessed with deep spiritual realization.

Thus lay devotees without number came to Dakshineswar, chief among them being Girish Ghose the dramatist, Pratap Chandra Hazra, Aswini Datta, Durga Charan Nag, Mahendra Gupta, and some others. It is interesting to note that Girish Ghose in his youth followed the evil path of wine and woman. He owned "the Star Theatre" where his work obliged him to mix with actresses. By his contact with Ramakrishna his whole being was transformed and a sinner became a saint.

Mahendra Gupta, as we know, had his allotted task. He took upon himself the work of recording the words of the Master as he spoke before the devotees. Mahendra perhaps did more for Ramakrishna than Plato for Socrates. We do not know whether Plato wrote down his Master's discourses, but in his Dialogues he set out the latter's teaching. Mahendra however put down verbatim the words he heard Ramakrishna speak to his devotees and thus gave the world an authentic record of the teaching of Ramakrishna.

It is no exaggeration to say that countless people came to Dakshineswar to see and hear Ramakrishna, and nobody kept a full account of it all. But the devotees who were destined for sannyasa (life of renunciation) did not begin to come until 1879. The first was Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda). Others were: Narendra (Swami Vivekananda), Jogin (Swami Jogananda), Niranjan (Swami Niranjanananda), Baburam (Swami Premananda), Sashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda), Sarat (Swami Saradananda), Lattu (Swami Advutananda), Kali (Swami Abhedananda), Tarak (Swami Shivananda), Buḍa Gopal (Swami Advaitananda), Subodh (Swami Subodhananda), Hari (Swami Turiyananda), Gangadhar (Swami Akhandananda), Tulasi (Swami Nirmalananda), and Hariprasanna (Swami Vijnanananda). Some women disciples also came, and later lived lives of renunciation; amongst them were Golap Ma, Gopal's mother and Gouri Ma.

All the above were great religious figures and their life-stories read like legends. Lattu was in a way the most wonderful of the whole group. He was completely illiterate, whereas his brethren were educated, some of them being college students. His early name was Rakhturam and he hailed from a village in the district of Chapra in Bihar. He lost his parents when he was only five years old and came in search of work to Calcutta where he served as a "house-boy" to Ram Chandra Datta who was a disciple of Ramakrishna.

A complete change came over Lattu when he met Ramakrishna to whom in time he became an attendant. He excelled his Master in one respect, illiteracy. Ramakrishna could just read and write in his mother tongue, but Lattu was innocent even of the alphabet of his vernacular. However, Ramakrishna passed a camel through the eye of a needle so that through his grace Lattu attained to high spiritual realization. In his later life scholars and learned men sat at his feet to hear his words. In short, Ramakrishna transformed his disciples by a touch or look, by means of which he communicated direct realization to them. He made each of them a spiritual dynamo.

The disciples attained to realization according to their capacities and ideals. Some saw visions of gods and goddesses, others plunged into deep meditation and reached the ecstatic state of realization of God or the Absolute. In 1885 a lay devotee called Purna Chandra Ghose came to Ramakrishna who averred that now the flow of devotees of the first order had ceased.

Since the meeting of Ramakrishna and Keshab in 1875 there had been a constant stream of people to Dakshineswar. Day and night for eleven long years the Master talked to them, and sang and danced in divine ecstasy. As a result he became very irregular about his food and drink, while because of his high spiritual state he had little sleep. Furthermore many sorts of people came and touched his feet, and the impure touch of the worldly-minded produced a burning sensation all over his body. Nevertheless, he did not cease to meet people and talk to them ; for that was his mission which he came to fulfil. At last he began to suffer from a sore throat, but he was not weighed down even by his disease. He carried on as before, and this aggravated his condition. The sore now developed into a malignant ulcer so that he could not eat solid food but lived on a little rice with milk.

The disciples were much concerned for their Master. They rented a house on Durgacharan Mukherjee Street at Bagbazar and brought him there. But Ramakrishna found the place far too small and stuffy and moved to the house of Balaram on Ramkanta Basu Street in the same district. He stayed there until more permanent arrangements for his comfort would be made.

Several well-known physicians of Calcutta treated him. They now diagnosed the disease as an incurable cancer.

At last the spacious drawing-room of Gokul Chandra Bhattacharyya of Shyampukur Street was hired for Ramakrishna. The disciples took him there and placed him under the treatment of Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar, who was a great homoeopath. The holy mother was then brought there and accommodated in a small place near the Master's room. Although the spiritual mother of Ramakrishna's disciples, she was rather shy and talked, when necessary, only to the boys among them. However, she did her utmost to serve her divine husband.

In the old days Mathur and Sambhu Mallik had been the *ration suppliers* of Ramakrishna and had ministered to his economic needs, such as they were. And it was very easy for them to do so as they were both well-off. Now, however, neither Balaram, Surendra, Ram, Girish nor Mahendra was rich enough. So they shared the entire burden of supporting Ramakrishna, supplying all that was necessary for him, from house-rent to the charges of homoeopathic treatment.

The disciples were in two minds over the illness of their Master. One group under Narendra (later Swami Vivekananda) argued that there was nothing to worry about as birth, growth, disease and death were natural, and that Ramakrishna's body was no exception to the rule. Girish and the others took a deeper view. They maintained that the disease of the Master had a divine purpose to serve and that he did not suffer as an ordinary man would.

Dr. Sarkar was a good soul and a great lover of Truth who did much for scientific education in India. He came regularly to examine Ramakrishna and stayed long discussing spiritual matters. Their talk was interspersed by divine songs sung by Ramakrishna. One day as the latter was singing one or two of the young disciples lost their normal consciousness through ecstasy. Sarkar being a physician and a scientist thought that it was a case of fainting. He said to Ramakrishna, "Well, it all seems to be your work." Ramakrishna was quick to reply: "No. Not mine. It is done by Her will. The minds of these boys are pure and are not yet scattered over wife, son, and wealth. So they get into a transport when they hear a song on the divine Mother."

When Sarkar came to Shyampukur to visit his patient he often forgot about the latter's precarious condition and began to discuss religious problems with him. And Ramakrishna in spite of the malignant sore from which he was suffering talked for hours together. One day in the presence of Sarkar one of the disciples told Ramakrishna that the doctor was sceptical of Incarnation. Indeed Sarkar had already mentioned the matter, saying "Avatar! What is that? To humble myself before a man who excretes dirt and urine?" Ramakrishna now said, "This much is hard to understand. How can a human being with all his limitations be the same as the infinite eternal supreme Being? One who has realized God knows that He appears to us as the phenomenal universe, as man and Nature. He *appears* as man with his limitations. But He really has no limitations. For instance, it cannot be said of Him that because He has taken a human shape He is not outside of that shape. He is here and at the same time elsewhere. One who has seen God sees all this and believes in it. The ordinary man with his ounce of reason cannot see this. Can a pot with a capacity for one seer of milk ever hold four seers?" The Master continued, "How could Sarkar believe in Incarnation? It is not mentioned in books on science or in the newspapers." This raised a laugh, and

Sarkar remained speechless ; Ramakrishna however reassured him that it did not matter much whether one believed in Incarnation. He tried to impress upon him that two things were needed for God-realization ; faith in, and self-surrender to, God.

The condition of the Master grew worse, but the enthusiasm and spiritual fervour of the disciples did not flag. The Day of Kāli the Mother drew near, and there was a sharp difference of opinion whether or not to arrange for Her worship. Some were against it thinking that it might exacerbate the condition of the Master. Girish however on his own initiative arranged for the worship. He brought leaves and flowers and offered them to the feet of Ramakrishna with a prayer to the World Mother. And straightway Ramakrishna went into a trance and gestured with his hands as if he was the Mother Herself. His whole body became luminous. Thereupon all the other disciples rushed in with fruits, flowers and sweetmeats and worshipped him with them. After some time he came down from his supernormal state.

One day at Shyampukur Ramakrishna vividly saw a wound in his subtle body. When Narendra learnt of it he speculated whether or not the wound was the result of the Master's vicarious suffering. But he could not come to any definite conclusion.

During this time something dramatic occurred. Ramakrishna once witnessed a religious drama at the Star Theatre, and praised the actress who played the principal part. When the play was over she came down and bowed to his feet. She was now seized with a yearning to see him again. But how? He was ill and some of his disciples were very strict, scarcely allowing anybody from outside to meet him. Above all, she was an actress, and, like all members of the stage, was looked down on in society. There was nevertheless one man to help her, Girish. On his advice she dressed herself up in hat, coat and trousers and came to Shyampukur for an interview with Ramakrishna. At that time people regarded

European costume with respect, even with some fear, and the visitor was at an advantage. The disciples who kept the door naturally thought that she was a great personage and allowed her in. When Ramakrishna heard of this, he was much pleased at her spiritual urge and resourcefulness. In any event, she achieved her objective, the grace of the Master. Girish later made fun of his brethren and lectured them for not allowing anyone who wanted to visit the saint. He was firmly convinced that the Lord had assumed a body in Ramakrishna for the purpose of satisfying His devotees.

It is of interest to narrate here two relevant facts, one about Bijoy Krishna Goswami and the other about Prabhu Dayal Misra ; both came to Shyampukur to see Ramakrishna. Bijoy told the disciples that he came because Ramakrishna had appeared to him in his room at Dacca, and that he had actually touched him.

When Prabhu Dayal visited Ramakrishna, he was dressed as a sannyasin. Nobody could know that he was a Christian until he said so. He was in fact a great yogi. He meditated and declared before all that Ramakrishna was Jesus Christ himself.

Be that as it may. Ramakrishna's illness now took a serious turn. As he was on a scanty diet his body was wasting away. His disciples grew very anxious and looked for better quarters for him. At last they rented the garden house of Gopal Chandra Ghose on the bank of the Ganga at Cossipore for Rs. 80 a month. They brought Ramakrishna there and made every possible arrangement for his treatment and comfort. The holy mother also joined them and had her assigned work. With the assistance of Lakshmi Devi, a niece of Ramakrishna, she prepared his daily meagre diet, and his disciples took turn to serve him.

All this was of no avail. The protracted illness reduced Ramakrishna's body to a skeleton. He had already told some of his disciples that he would divulge the whole secret before his departure from the world. He had also tried to make clear to them that his body would perish as soon as people began to look upon him as a divine being. The disciples indeed had faced the acid test. But what sort of people were they who had given their heart, their soul, their all for his sake, and most of whom were later to become mendicants?

The majority of the young disciples were students, but some were elderly and others were employed in offices in Calcutta. The guardians of the boys were hard on them for neglecting their studies, and those who worked in offices had to keep their jobs and at the same time to come and serve the Master. At that time Narendra was very busy with his law examination, and was involved in litigation in the High Court over his ancestral property. He thought that he would be unable wholeheartedly to follow the path of religion until he had settled his family matters. In the mean time, however, he brought his books to the Cossipore house for study whenever he could find time.

About a month after the removal to Cossipore Ramakrishna showed some signs of improvement, and Dr. Sarkar became hopeful. On the first of January, 1886, which was a holiday, many household devotees came in the early afternoon to see the Master. The devotees were in groups gossiping and loitering round the house. Unexpectedly Ramakrishna went out into the garden and met some of the disciples—Girish, Ram, Atul, and some others who were standing together under a tree. The Master said, "Girish, you talk to people so much about me. What then have you seen and understood?" Girish was not surprised but in simple faith replied, "What can I say about Him who remained incomprehensible even to Bālmiki?" And saying this Girish fell at his feet. The other disciples crowded around Ramakrishna who got into a benign state and said softly to them, "Well, what else can I say unto you? I bless you all that you be awakened." Thereupon the devotees prostrated themselves on the ground before Ramakrishna and took the dust of his feet on their heads. And he in his supreme state touched each of them, and they were all filled. They had immediately various spiritual experiences according to their respective capacities and ideals. Some became all steady, others were shedding tears of joy, and the rest were just shouting, at whom though they did not know. It was a unique scene. But there were no outsiders to witness it. And, strangely enough, no one of the devotees, including Narendra, who were destined to be sannyasins, was present on the great occasion.

After a nightlong watch over the Master most of the disciples were asleep upstairs. Lattu and Sarat were exceptions, but they were far too busy dusting Ramakrishna's bed and cleaning his room to have an inkling of what happened in the garden below. They came to know of it when the devotees who were blessed as described above told them the thrilling experiences they had achieved through the blessings of the Master. That was really a great day for the lay devotees at the Cossipore garden house, great because on that occasion Ramakrishna revealed his divine nature to them.

One day Pandit Sasadhar came to visit Ramakrishna. He was under the impression that the latter was a great yogi and that he could easily cure his own disease as others had done by yogic power. Sasadhar, therefore, in good faith said to him, "Well, Sir, you have the power to cure your malady." Ramakrishna seemed astonished and replied in a tone of rebuke, "You are a scholar and you speak like this. I have given my all to my Mother and there is nothing to withdraw from Her to fix on the body." Sasadhar was dumbfounded.

During the last few days of his life Ramakrishna sometimes appeared to be in a playful mood with the disciples who became his constant companions. One morning there was a wonderful manifestation of the Master's love. He said to Niranjan, "You are my father. I shall be in your lap." He touched Kalipada on the head and said, "Awake". Two women disciples also received similar blessings. He rose into a supreme state and touched their heart with his feet, and they were forthwith in a transport and shedding tears.

One evening Ramakrishna sat talking with Kali, Chunilal, Mahendra, Navagopal, Sashi, and Niranjan.

Suddenly he said to Mahendra, "Well, how long will it take to cure the disease?" The disciple told him that the cancer was malignant and that it would take six months to cure it completely. At that Ramakrishna appeared excited and snapped out, "What do you say? Well, how is it that in spite of all these divine visions, ecstasy and samādhi I still suffer from disease?" The disciple hinted that his illness had a deep meaning which, however, he did not make clear. Ramakrishna continued, "Yes, my preaching is coming to an end. I see everything as Rāma Himself, and sometimes I wonder whom I shall teach."

At this period Ramakrishna often noticed that everything appeared to be vanishing into the formless and indicated that this was a sign of his approaching death. He said to Mani, "When the Lord incarnates Himself for the sake of His devotees many of the latter also come with Him. Some of them belong to the inner circle, some to the outer, and some indeed are the commissaries." He explained this by saying that those who renounced the world and became his constant attendants belonged to the inner circle of devotees, whereas those of the outer circle only paid occasional visits to, and made formal inquiries about, him. He was referring in particular to Bhavanath. The latter one day came dressed like a bridegroom to Shyampukur and asked Ramakrishna how he was doing. He then went away and never returned. The devotees who acted as commissaries were those who supplied the needs of the Master's daily life. They were Rani Rashmani, Mathur, Sambhu Mallik, Ram, Balaram, Girish and Surendra.

Ramakrishna now opened his mind to the disciples and freely described the visions he had previously had of some of them. As he narrated, one day he had seen a fair-complexioned man with a cap on his head, whom he identified long after as Surendra. Then, though not in a superconscious state, at Dakshineswar he saw Balaram in the Kirtan[5] procession of Sri Chaitanya. Then, as he averred, he recognized Sashi and Sarat among the followers of Rishi Krisṇa (Jesus Christ).[6]

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[5] A kind of divine music introduced into Bengal by Sri Chaitanya about 500 years before Ramakrishna.

While at Dakshineswar Ramakrishna had the vision that a son would be born to him. But he wondered how this could be as to him every woman was Mother. The son was a spiritual one, however, and turned out to be Rakhal (later Swami Brahmananda). Ramakrishna also mentioned Mathur Babu. He said that the divine Mother had sent for his comfort a rich man who served him for fourteen years. The Vairabi identified Mathur with Pratap Rudra, King of Orissa, who some centuries before served Sri Chaitanya with the utmost devotion. Ramakrishna had also had a vision of himself living on pudding alone towards the end of his life.

Narendra was a Vedāntist and so did not believe in Incarnation, although Ramakrishna had often discussed the theory in his presence. One day when sitting with the Master in the Cossipore house, he thought: "I shall believe in him if he himself says that he is an Incarnation." Ramakrishna at once pointed to himself and said, "Look, verily there is in the body what Rāma or Krisṇa is." Narendra did not say one word. He instead fixed his gaze upon the Master.

One day Ramakrishna went into samādhi and on awaking from the state touched Narendra and said, "Today I have given you my all, and now I am a fakir possessing nothing. By this power you will do infinite good to the world and you will not return until your task is fulfilled." Ramakrishna died on August 15, 1886. That morning before entering samādhi for ever he placed his disciples in the charge of Narendra, saying "Take care of these boys."

Ramakrishna's illness had an important result as it forced his most ardent devotees to form a well-knit association, which has since developed into a world-wide spiritual organization. It works for peace and harmony in the world by emphasizing the spiritual end of human life and by preaching that religions are but different paths to the same supreme goal.

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[6] Ramakrishna pronounced the Bengali name Jisu Christa as Rishi Krisṇa.

On March 20, 1886 when staying at the Cossipore garden house Ramakrishna hinted to "M" that he would soon die. "M" grew anxious and told him that his disciples could not possibly live without him. The Master reassured "M", saying that they need not worry since joy, delight and much more were in store for them, and that they, the direct disciples, would achieve much. He meant that they, like children inheriting a large family property, would enjoy greatly the spiritual wealth that he had left them.

Ramakrishna however had already told some of his disciples that he would come again to earthly life. The holy mother, the divine consort of Ramakrishna, told Nikunja Devi, wife of "M", that the Master had said unto her, "I know who you and Lakshmi[7] are. But I won't tell you that now. . . . I shall come again in the guise of a Bowl[8] and bring you with me ; I shall have a *hookah*[9] in my hand."[10]

On December 24, 1883 "M" was sitting by Ramakrishna on the bank of the Ganga at Dakshineswar, and the Master was speaking on spiritual themes. He said, "He (God) comes down as an Incarnation and teaches mankind divine knowledge and love. Well, what do you think I am? Father went to Gayā where Raghuvira[11] said to him in a dream, "I shall be your son." Father, however, said, "I am a poor Brahmin. How shall I serve you, I wonder." Thereupon Raghuvira said, "That would be done."

"My elder sister, mother of Hriday,[12] worshipped me with flowers and sandal paste. One day Mother[13] put Her feet on her head and said, "You will die at Banaras."

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[7] Ramakrishna's niece.

[8] A mendicant who sings divine songs.

[9] An Indian smoking pipe.

[10] Anil Gupta: *"Unpublished Diary of "M", Free-Lance,* December, 1954.

[11] A previous Incarnation of God.

[12] Ramakrishna's nephew who attended on him during his sādhanā.

[13] Ramakrishna himself.

"Sejo Babu[14] said, 'God is within you; there is nothing else. Your body is a mere shell just like a pumpkin which has neither kernel nor seeds inside. I saw you as someone going away under a hood.' . . .

"I wanted to know the realization of Gauranga.[15] I was shown all this in that part of the country—at Shambazar.[16] Trees and walls were crowded with men. Day and night people surrounded me, and for full seven days I had indeed no time to answer a call of nature. Then I said to the divine Mother, 'Mother, no more now.' That is why I am now quiet. *I shall have to come again.* This is the reason why I am not giving the inner circle of my devotees full knowledge. (With a smile), if I give you all knowledge, why, then, should you so easily come to me again?"[17]

One day Ramakrishna was explaining to some of his devotees that life is full of hazard and that if one has desires one must assume a body again in a new birth. Now one of the devotees asked the Master, "What desires had those who came as Incarnations?" Ramakrishna with a smile said, "I have seen that all desires are not yet gone in me. On seeing a friar's wrapper, I had a desire to wear such a piece. I have still such a desire, because I know that I shall have to come again."[18]

On one occasion Ramakrishna said to Mahima Charan, one of his devotees: "It is sufficient for the boys who come here to know only two things. In that case they would not have to practise much more meditation and worship. First, who am I? Then, who are they? Many of the boys belong to the inner circle of my devotees indeed. Those who are in the inner circle are not, however, granted ultimate liberation from life; for I shall assume a body again in the north-western corner."[19]

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[14] Mathur Babu.
[15] Sri Chaitanya.
[16] A few miles from Kamarpukur, the birthplace of Ramakrishna.
[17] *Kathāmrita*, IV, viii, 2.
[18] *Op. cit.*, xxiii, 2.
[19] *Op. cit.*, xxiv, 2.

CHAPTER V

RAMAKRISHNA ON REALITY

Pandit Iswar Chandṛa Vidyāsāgar was a great Sanskrit scholar, as well as being a philanthropist and a reformer. Ramakrishna, therefore, called on him in Calcutta[1] and was received as an honoured guest. He said that he had often crossed marshes and rivers in his travels, but now for the first time was faced with the ocean. This was a pun because Iswar Chandra was called Vidyāsāgar which means an ocean of learning. He went on wittily to point out that the sea is a vast expanse of water which is too salt to drink. If, therefore, the pundit was an ocean he must be one of milk, not of salt water. Now *vidyā* means knowledge and *avidyā* ignorance. Milk which nourishes the body can therefore be compared to *vidyā* which leads to Truth, and sea water, which is harmful to drink, to *avidyā,* which retards the growth of the spirit. The pundit was certainly possessed of great learning and of the milk of human kindness. He was therefore well on the road to Reality.

Ramakrishna then called him a 'perfect' man. But this was a play on the Bengali word 'siddha' which also means 'boiled'. Now a perfect man is one who had attained to union with God, or has realized ultimate Reality. But the pundit presumably had not yet reached the peak of spiritual experience, and had no pretensions to perfection. So Ramakrishna must have meant that he was well boiled, a process which makes hard things soft and supple. Now Iswar Chandra was a philanthropist and very kind-hearted. Charity, compassion, kindness towards the poor and patriotism had chastened his soul, purified his mind and fitted him for spiritual life. And so Ramakrishna tried to show him that social service was not the final purpose of life. He discoursed at length on the perfect man in the following manner.

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[1] *Vide Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (according to "M"), Vol. I, 5th impression, pp. 81-132, Madras, 1930.

Philosophers talk glibly about *Brahman,* God and the Absolute. But there is a world of difference between talking philosophic truths and realizing them. The path of reason or discursive thought does not lead to realization. *Brahman* is beyond all duality. The Absolute far transcends the world of ignorance and even that kind of knowledge which leads towards it. It is like the roof of a house and the kind of knowledge which leads to it resembles the last step of the staircase leading to the roof. The Absolute cannot be attained by any amount of learning, talking or reasoning. Grammar, logic and philosophy may be useful to the aspirant up to a certain point and in so far as they help him to understand the scriptures. In the ultimate state of realization, however, they all drop off. *Brahman* is beyond both thought and speech.[2]

The Absolute is above all determination. It is like an ocean which is too vast for human speech to describe. We cannot measure the whole expanse of water therein, we are merely overwhelmed by that portion which we see. Once some ants came on a mountain of sugar. Each of them took a few grains and ate its fill, took a few more in its mouth and turned homeward. On their way back they thought that next time they would carry the whole mountain home.[3] Unconscious of their limitations they did not realize that the mountain was made up of an infinite number of particles or grains and so could never be carried away by them. Why indeed should they want to do so when only a few grains were sufficient for each of them?

Such is the condition of those who have realized the supreme Being. Many of them are left with the impression that they have realized the whole of Reality, or rather that the latter could not be other than as it is realized by them. On the other hand, the truth is that a human being even in his spiritual experience can only get hold of a fraction of Reality. A little of it fills and overwhelms him. What more does he need? Why is there, then, a fuss about Reality? Some say that it is one, undifferentiated and without form, others that it is personal and has forms.

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[2] *Op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.

[3] *Op. cit.*, p. 90 ; *Kathāmrita* (in Bengali), by "M", II, viii, 3.

According to the Advaitist or Absolutist, Reality is absolutely indeterminate being beyond the conditioned and the relative. So, in the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi*—of realization of the Indeterminate—the distinction between subject and object, knower and known, vanishes. In that state the individual soul is said to be one with Reality.

Now, if Reality is absolutely indeterminate, and if to realize it is to become it, how can there be any talk about the Unconditioned? The conditioned being, an individual as he is in his conditioned existence, can have no conception whatever of unconditioned Reality. Again, if the conditioned being somehow sheds his individuality to enter the Unconditioned, he is lost for ever. He is no more and cannot bring down to mankind the message of the Absolute.

Once upon a time a doll of salt went to fathom the sea.[4] At the edge of the water it was still a doll, but as soon as it entered the sea it melted away, and was no more. It became identical with the sea water. Salt came from the sea. And now salt in the form of the doll went back to its source. The salt doll was then in no way different from the sea water. The human soul is like the salt doll, and the Absolute is like the vast sea. In the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi,* in which the aspirant realizes the Absolute, his individuality is eliminated altogether. If, therefore, the Absolutist account of the nature of Reality and of the state of realization is final, there can be no coming back from the state which is professedly one of absolute identity.

According to Śankara and his followers, the Absolute is the sole Reality and all things and beings that together make up the world are unreal. Matter, life, mind, and soul in its different states, such as waking, dreaming and deep sleep, are all *māyā* or illusion. The Absolute is realized in a state in which no trace is left of individuality or the ego. How then can we rise to the supreme state of ecstasy?

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[4] *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* Vol. I, p. 91.

According to the Advaitist, (Absolutist Vedāntist), the scriptures embody the highest experiences of ancient seers and sages. So, the aspirant cannot hope to attain to the Absolute except through the scriptures.[5] He must first apprehend the meaning of the holy texts, then think them out and finally contemplate the reasoned truths. Prolonged contemplation in the end leads the aspirant away from the world of *māyā* or illusion and plunges him into the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi,* in which the distinction between knower and known, subject and object, disappears and the differentiated is lost in the Undifferentiated. The Undifferentiated and Unconditioned is the end of the Advaita method of realization, which has nothing to do with God the Personal either as an end or as a means.

On the other hand, the illusionists contend that God the Personal is far less than the Absolute. The former belongs to the sphere of *māyā* and is phenomenal, being only an appearance of *Brahman* or the Absolute through *māyā*—the cosmic principle of Ignorance. In the preliminary stages of his spiritual discipline the Advaitist relies on the scriptures, on his reason, and finally on himself and his power of contemplation. He thinks that reasoning and the resulting discrimination and dispassion are potent enough to lead him to the goal. The fact, however, remains that the Advaitist is as much a creature of *māyā* as any other human being. So, from the nature of the case he is as much entangled in Ignorance as any of his fellow beings. How is it, then, that he finds a way out? He cannot do so by himself. He may make much of the Absolute and make slight of a personal God, but the fact is that God, the Lord of the universe, who creates, sustains and destroys His creations as He pleases, determines also the attitude that the Advaitist adopts. To him the urge for liberation as well as his power of discrimination and dispassion comes from the Lord. He leads an aspirant into the state of samādhi—supreme bliss, in which he realizes the Absolute. He effaces the ego or individuality of the person concerned in *nirvikalpa samādhi* and finally brings him back to the plane of empirical consciousness by retaining for him a purified ego.

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[5] *Cf. Brahma-Sūtra,* I, i, 3.

The Advaitist may attain to the knowledge of the Absolute. But the attainment remains fragmentary as it excludes knowledge of the source of the light that illuminates his path. The knowledge which the illusionist calls the peak of mystical experience is only another name for ignorance. The aspirant in *nirvikalpa samādhi* indeed passes beyond all differentiation. Nevertheless, he achieves that state without the remotest idea that it is the Lord who ordains everything in the universe and that He holds the key even to the realization of the Absolute.

God is the Ordainer of the universe. He is the divine Person. As such He cannot be unreal, that is, a mere construction of *māyā*. We may call Him father or mother. That makes no difference to our conception of Him. Either of these terms indicates that God is a Person. We cannot doubt or question the fact of God's Personality. That is given in revelation. God reveals Himself to His devotees in many forms, which are spiritual and are infinitely more real than any of the reals of the world. They are realized with an organ of spiritual vision developed in the spiritual body that the aspirant derives from the Lord Himself. Sometimes the Lord reveals Himself to His devotees in human form by assuming human birth.

Sometimes the sādhaka[6] comes out of *nirvikalpa samādhi*, the state of realization of the Absolute, and retains a semblance of the "I". But how does it come about? In that state the ego of the aspirant is gone and there is absolute identity ; there is *Brahman*—the Absolute alone and there is no *māyā*. Why, then, does the sādhaka return to the empirical plane? What makes him do so, restoring him to the empirical world? The aspirant as a spiritual apprentice strives after realization and is conscious of the effort he makes. But in *nirvikalpa samādhi* he as an individual is wholly lost ; he is not there, far less any of his efforts. On the other hand, *Brahman*—the Absolute is immutable ; no action can be attributed to it. In the face of such facts the return of the sādhaka from *nirvikalpa samādhi* to the plane of appearance is an enigma.

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[6] Spiritual aspirant.

It has been revealed that the Mother of the universe, as Ramakrishna used to call God, leads one into, and brings one out of, the Undifferentiated, if She pleases. She sometimes effaces the ego of the aspirant, and he gets merged into the Absolute. To one She vouchsafes the knowledge of the Undifferentiated and yet retains for him a very thin and transparent layer of the "I" to enable him to work for Her purpose. To another She reveals Herself in Her spiritual forms. It is from Her that the urge for prayer, meditation and devotion proceed. As Ramakrishna said, the Mother revealed to him that She was *Brahman*—the Absolute as well as the Personal God. Both the knowledge of the Formless and visions of Her forms are in the gift of the Mother. Who else could reveal the Absolute? The saint in samādhi obviously cannot by himself come out of his state.

There is so much talk about the Absolute. Philosophers wrangle over the word and remain far from the realization of absolute Truth. They rely upon reason, power of which is nothing compared to that of God. The power of discrimination itself on the part of the philosopher is a gift of God. The divine Person is therefore the pivot on which the absolute and relative worlds turn. He is the unity that goes into differentiation and at the same time transcends it.

No analogy can explain the relation between God and the Absolute. That is wholly a matter of realization. An analogy can help us to have a glimpse into the Supreme, of which it can give us no articulate knowledge. If there is a distinction between God and the Absolute, between the Absolute as Uncreated and Uncreating and God as Uncreated and yet Creating, the distinction is one without a difference. We often distinguish between fire and its burning power, but we cannot drive a wedge between the two. It is not that fire is a complete fact apart from the power of burning. The latter, on the other hand, is an abstraction apart from fire. Similarly we cannot separate between a moving serpent and its movement as both are one. On these analogies we must conceive the relation between God and the Absolute, which in reality are not two entities.

"God" and "the Absolute" are two names for the same supreme Being. We cannot say that He is this absolutely, nor can we say that He is not that. Everything is possible for Him. He is ineffable and omnipotent. He is the maker and giver of all laws. The divine Mother, God the Personal, imparts love, devotion, prayer, self-surrender, and so forth, to the devotee, changes his ego of ignorance into that of knowledge and makes him a channel of Her activities. Again, if She pleases, She leads him to the knowledge of the Absolute and yet keeps his ego in its pure form to enable him to enjoy divine glory and bliss.

It ought to be clear that the Divine cannot be exhausted by any finite spirit or by any spiritual experience. The Divine reveals Himself as both Personal and Impersonal, the one to the devotee, the other to those who realize the Absolute. The Absolutist rejects as unreal all forms, even when they are spiritual, and fixes upon the Absolute as the sole Reality.

Realization on the part of the devotee is limited to divine forms or to divine Personality. Nevertheless this is enough for him. It fills his whole being. Yet he may be led on to the realization of the Formless. Even the latter, however, is not final, and it is not that the divine forms are false, for they are most real. In realizing a divine form one attains the Divine Himself. So, the spiritual forms of the Divine remain outside the realization to which the Absolutist attains.

Still it cannot be gainsaid that the realization of the Formless and Undifferentiated is enough for the aspirant concerned. Therein the ego of the sādhaka is liquidated, all ignorance ceases, and the Undifferentiated alone in its absolute identity shines forth.

It was given in revelation that the Divine was at once Personal and Impersonal. So there is a state which combines within it the realization of the Personal and that of the Impersonal. Such is the state of the *Vijnāni*—the most perfect, who goes into *nirvikalpa samādhi* and comes out of it again with a purified ego to realize that all things and beings of the world are manifestations of the One, the Absolute. The *Vijnāni* is not merely a devotee of the Personal God, nor is he again merely an Absolutist. He realizes God with forms in conscious, and the Absolute in the sense of the Undifferentiated in superconscious, samādhi. The *Vijnāni* still retains through grace a semblance of the ego and realizes that God is identical with the Absolute and is manifesting in the things and beings of the universe. The *Vijnāni's* is the supreme state of knowledge and bliss. He realizes all that is possible of the Deity. That is, in short, a *Vijnāni*—a perfect man. His experience marks the consummation of the human realization of God.

I have given above an analysis of the talk Ramakrishna gave on Reality at the house of Vidyāsāgar. Let me now attempt a commentary on it.

Some may stagger at this analysis and point out that, if the Absolute is the sole Reality, the perfect man is he who has realized the Absolute, and that though he comes out of the supreme state of ecstasy, he has nothing more to realize. The question, then, is whether the perfect man realizes, or needs to realize any spiritual form of God as well as the Formless. We have to see exactly how Ramakrishna settles this question. "*Vijnānis*", he said, "are they who have realized God in samādhi both (1) as the Impersonal or the Undifferentiated and (2) as God the Personal."[7]

Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of samādhi, *nirvikalpa* and *savikalpa.* In the former the Formless, the Undifferentiated, is attained, while in the latter God the Personal is realized. The *Vijnāni* or perfect man is he who has realized both. He might first have realized the Deity with a form or forms and then taken a plunge into the Formless and come out of it again to the empirical plane. Or he might have gone straight into the Formless and then emerged with a purified ego to realize the divine forms. It does not matter much what forms of the Divine he has realized as they are infinite. Certainly to the *Vijnāni* the things and beings that go to make up the world appear as the forms in which the Formless manifests itself. There are besides spiritual aspects of the Deity which are revealed only to spiritual vision. The *Vijnāni,* therefore, realizing as he does all that is possible of Reality, remains in a supreme state of knowledge and bliss even on the empirical plane.

Ramakrishna repeatedly declared that the state of the *Vijnāni* was far higher than that of the *Jnāni,* the knower of the Undifferentiated. The Absolute, the Undifferentiated, is like the roof of a house which can be reached by a staircase.[8] The realization of the Absolute is indeed attained through a very hard discipline. Generally one who has it merges into it and never returns to the empirical world.

In the course of a dialogue Ramakrishna in his characteristic way marked out the stages by which the realization of the Absolute is attained. He spoke of seven planes,[9] which correspond to the seven bodily centres. In yogic literature mention is made of the *Ṣaṭcakra,* the six nerve-centres in the body, each of which is described as being like a lotus. Through the spinal cord there runs a subtle nerve called *Suṣumnā.* The six lotuses are strung out along this nerve at the anus, the genital organ, the navel, the heart, the throat and the point between the eyebrows.[10] The plane of consciousness in which one lives is then determined by the nerve-centre through which the mind is functioning.

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[7] *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* Vol. I, pp. 98, 100, 113, 382; Vol. II, 2nd impression, p. 238, Madras, 1928.

[8] *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* Vol. II, p. 87.

[9] *Op. cit.,* pp. 39-40.

Ramakrishna told his hearers that the mind of the worldly man dwelt, for the most part, in the anus, the genital organ, and the navel, as these centres keep the body going and prompt its basic needs. When, however, the mind rises to the heart, the fourth plane, the soul is seized with a divine urge. There the person concerned feels a new awakening; he is filled with awe and wonder and is no more attracted by sense life. When the mind soars still higher and begins to function through the nerve-centre corresponding to the throat, the aspirant becomes God-intoxicated and likes to hear and speak constantly of Him. The sixth plane of consciousness is reached when the mind rises to the lotus just behind the forehead, where the sādhaka gets merged in God-consciousness, though the consciousness of the "I" is not yet lost. Above all six nerve-centres there lies in the head the thousand-petalled lotus, the supreme nerve-centre in which the spinal column terminates. When the aspirant transcends the sixth plane, his being is poised in the plane beyond which there is no other. He loses all consciousness of the empirical world, of the "I", and falls into samādhi. In this state he can eat nothing. He remains on this plane in complete identity with the Absolute, and after twenty-one days, we are told, his body dies. It is a natural process. The individual, like the salt doll, melts into the Infinite.

Sometimes the sādhaka through the grace of God recovers a semblance of his ego. He comes out of samādhi to realize the things and beings of the world as manifestations of the Infinite. Some go up to the roof of a house but cannot come down, while others can ascend to as well as descend from the height. The former are the *Jnānis,* who have realized the Undifferentiated and Formless, whereas the latter are the *Vijnānis,* who have realized Reality as both undifferentiated and differentiated, as both without and with form.

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[10] *Ṣaṭcakra-nirūpaṇam,* ed. by Kaliprasanna Vidyaratna, p. 182, Calcutta, 1332 B.S.

Ramakrishna himself likened the Absolute to the roof of a house, suggesting thereby that the Absolute is the highest height. It may therefore be argued that the knowledge of it is the peak of spiritual experience and that there can be no state higher than it, for there can be no question of going beyond the Absolute. Further the terms "Absolute" and "relative", "Unconditioned" and "conditioned", "Formless" and "with forms", are three sets of contradictories or contraries.

It may be urged that Ramakrishna got involved in self-contradiction when he asserted that God was both the Absolute and the relative, with forms and without form, both personal and impersonal. Again, we may be told that in different contexts he referred to the realization of God the Personal as representing a lower spiritual plane than that of undifferentiated *Brahman* or the Absolute. On the surface Ramakrishna's teaching is a bundle of contradictions. Here, however, we are confronted with three distinct questions: whether the Absolute, the Undifferentiated, is the sole reality; whether contradictories are true of God; and whether the phrase "a lower spiritual plane" as applied to that of the *Vijnāni* contradicts itself. I shall discuss each of them.

According to Advaita Vedānta or Abstract Absolutism, *Brahman* or the Absolute is the sole reality; the multiplicity of things and beings comprising the world is unreal; and the individual spirit is in its essence identical with the Absolute. Narendra Datta, later known as Swami Vivekananda, was of the Advaitist turn of mind. He begged Ramakrishna that he might remain immersed in samādhi. But the Master rebuked him affectionately, saying "You are very low-minded. There is a higher state yet than that."[11]

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[11] *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* Vol. II, pp. 360-361; also *Cf. Vedanta Kesari,* Vol. XXV, p. 406.

Obviously he was referring to the *Vijnāni*, who comes out of *nirvikalpa samādhi* consciously to realize that the multiplicity is a manifestation of Reality.

The whole thing hinges upon whether there is anything higher than the Absolute. Clearly, there cannot be if the latter is the whole of Reality. But the word "Absolute" can be used in two senses. In Advaita Vedānta it stands for the Undifferentiated, Immutable and Eternal as against the differentiated, evanescent and temporal. And the Absolute is reached and realized in *nirvikalpa samādhi* which marks the culmination of the process of negating the empirical levels of being as unreal. But manifestly the Undifferentiated does not accommodate within itself the differentiated world. The world falls apart and is, in fact, dismissed as illusory by the Advaitist. The Absolute may, however, be conceived to be the whole which in some way includes the relative. To put it in our way, the former is the abstract, while the latter is the concrete Absolute.

In Ramakrishna's Dialogues we find that he employed the word "Absolute" in both senses without making quite clear the distinction between them. In one context he said, "First, by a process of negation one comes to feel that God alone is true and all else false. But one finds eventually that God Himself has become the *maya,* the individuals, the world and everything. . . . A Bilwa (a bael or woodapple) fruit, for instance, is made of kernel, seeds and shell ; when you want the kernel, you remove the seeds and the shell ; but if you seek to determine its total weight you cannot leave them out of count".[12] Much in the same way when one seeks to realize God, one eliminates by analysis the multiplicity, and when one has realized Him, one finds that God Himself has become the individuals and the world. Ramakrishna exhorted his hearers to reach the Lord, the undivided Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, and told them that when they had returned to the phenomenal world they would perceive the multiplicity as His manifestation.[13]

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[12] *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* Vol. II, p. 204.

Ramakrishna averred that God the Personal was identical with the Absolute, the Impersonal. This means that God as the supreme Being is both personal and impersonal, and is therefore the unity of these two opposites. He creates and sustains the universe, and as the Ordainer thereof His activity involves an eternal purpose and order. But this does not entail any diminution of His being. God is not in time. On the contrary, time itself is to be traced to Him. In creating or manifesting Himself in the form of the spatio-temporal order God does not undergo any change. He remains even in His manifestations self-identical, immutable and eternal. Thus, though He is the divine Person, He transcends personality in the ordinary sense of the word. This shows that personality is only, for want of a better word, a moment in His being. On the other hand, God, the Absolute as He is, in the sense that He is undifferentiated, formless and immutable, manifests Himself in the form of the world. So the Absolute in this sense is only another moment in His total being. It is not that now God is the divine Person, now the Absolute. He is both at once. But these moments, as we call them, cannot exhaust the supreme Being. He is ineffable. What He is in Himself beyond the Personal and the Impersonal no one can tell.[14] Sādhakas can realize either or both of these aspects, but being human they cannot exhaust Reality. That is all. Some may feel bewildered at this analysis, for the Personal and the Impersonal are after all contraries. They may ask: "Can contraries be true of God?" This brings us to the second question.

In different contexts Ramakrishna discussed whether God was formless or had forms. He was emphatically of the opinion that God was both and that even contradictories were true of Him. To some Ramakrishna might seem to be a crank; for, according to him, God could not respect the laws of logic.[15] From the point of view of ordinary experience contradictories are incompatibles, and so cannot be combined in thought. For instance, individual colours are contraries in relation to one another, since nothing can take on two of them at the same time. A flag, for example, may be red or green or yellow. But it cannot be at once red, green and yellow, although three distinct parts of the flag may respectively be so. The colours become incompatible with one another as soon as we seek to combine them as covering the whole flag. It is upon this sense of incompatibility that the principle of contradiction rests. And it is upon the principle of contradiction, or, which is the same thing, upon the abstract law of identity that the fabric of Advaita Vedānta is built.

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[13] *Op. cit.*, p. 205.

[14] *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Vol. I, p. 150.

If we take to reasoning, we find that everything, or every level of being that we fix upon in our experience transcends itself. In other words, it does not contain within itself its conditions; the explanation of its origin falls beyond itself. Thus on analysis everything comes to be regarded as unreal or mere appearance; for the real in the strict sense must be self-existent and self-contained. That is why the Advaitist posits *Brahman,* which is self-identical and self-existent, beyond the world and discards all phenomena as illusory. And if we seek to give any status to the world of phenomena, we have to conceive them as eternally negated in immutable *Brahman.*

All this appears to be true from the point of view of logical reasoning that proceeds on the principles of contradiction and abstract identity. By ordinary logic the Many falls apart from the One, diversity from Unity, the world from *Brahman.* So either the Many or Multiplicity is to be merged in the Undifferentiated, or an unintelligible principle like *māyā* is to be smuggled in to explain away the world of phenomena. The Advaitist holds that in the superconscious state of *nirvikalpa samādhi* the sādhaka becomes *Brahman,* his ego is eliminated and that there the world does not at all appear. It is true that the state of realization of the undifferentiated One must be one of complete identity; there *Brahman* alone shines forth. But the point is that sometimes the sādhaka comes out of the supreme state to live on the empirical plane, and in fact remains there in a state of conscious liberation or conscious realization of the Supreme. This is indeed a hard nut for the Advaitist to crack; he is hard put to it to explain the state.

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[15] *Vide Brahma-Sūtra,* III, ii, 11.

Ramakrishna repeatedly told his hearers that to him God revealed Himself as both personal and impersonal, with forms as well as without form. He, if He chooses, leads the sādhaka to the realization of the Impersonal, in which state the latter loses himself wholly in the Undifferentiated. Again, if He pleases, He brings the aspirant out of the state of identity, retaining his purified ego. God reveals Himself as a Person, even talks to the devotee in the pre-samādhi stage of his spiritual development or in his state of *Jivanmukti,* conscious liberation, or in both. God not only manifests Himself in the multitudinous things and beings of the universe, but He reveals Himself to His devotees in many a spiritual form which is no illusion. Ramakrishna even goes to the length of saying that some of God's spiritual forms are eternal.[16] Some devotees regard the realization of these forms as of vastly more value even than the attainment of the Absolute. They would like to taste, but never want to become, sugar.[17] They would want to retain their individuality, so that they may enjoy the supreme bliss of realization of divine forms. They prefer conscious union with the Deity to being altogether melted into the undifferentiated One.

Some contend that God-vision is a fraud. God, they say, is through and through a spiritual Being; so He cannot have mind or soul, far less nerves, hands and feet. How can He, then, be a person or have any personal form? And this attitude is maintained on two distinct grounds. On the one hand, it is contended that all forms are sensuous and that to God we cannot possibly ascribe sensuous features. On the other hand, it is pointed out that God as the Supreme must be beyond name and form, in short, the Absolute. But the issue at stake here is not one that can be reasoned out. To settle it we must fall back upon revelation. Ramakrishna told his disciples that God is both personal and impersonal. He reveals Himself to the sādhaka, if He pleases, with forms or without form or in both ways. All this is given in revelation, and revelation is infallible. Reason cannot question it.

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[16] *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* Vol. II, p. 113.
[17] Vol. I, p. 121.

But doubt still assails us. We wonder how the Supreme can assume contradictory or contrary features. But it does not matter; doubt will always trouble us until our ignorance is cleared away by His grace.[18] The parables Ramakrishna employed in the course of his teaching help us to understand what we can of the divine mystery.[19] Here is one of them.

There was a quarrel about the colour of a chameleon. Some said that they had seen it to be red; others claimed that it was green; yet others thought that the animal was yellow. Then someone came along and asked: "Well, what are you disputing about?" and each offered his own explanation. The stranger listened to them all and said, "Don't make fools of yourselves. I reside under the tree on which the chameleon you are disputing about lives. I have minutely observed it and have found that now it is red, now green, now yellow, and so forth. Sometimes again it has no colour at all."

One may argue that this analogy does not help as a particular colour is true of the chameleon at a given time.

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[18] *Op. cit.*, p. 308.

[19] *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Vol. II, p. 112; *Kathāmrita* (in Bengali) by "M", Part I, iii, 5.

There are therefore no contraries as far as the animal is concerned. That is obvious, but the colours which the chameleon assumes in succession cannot exhaust its appearance. The lizard is there in its full being, though in it sometimes no colour appears. Is it, then, correct to say that the chameleon with a colour is less real than the one without, or that the real animal is colourless and that whatever hue it manifests is illusory? To the observer it is the same chameleon, colour or no colour.

The point is that the supreme Being reveals Himself to some with forms, as a Person, and to others without any form, as impersonal and formless. These sādhakas, however, realize the same supreme Being, with or without form. The one is not less real than the other.

The sceptic may urge that the main difficulty is not cleared up, as it has not yet been settled how God can combine contradictories in Himself. The Formless is the negation of the formed, the Undifferentiated of the differentiated and the Impersonal of the personal. How can, then, God assume opposites? Here we shall do well to consider the nature of contradictories or contraries, which are common in our ordinary experience. But from this we cannot conclude that God needs to choose between opposites. If someone realizes God as the divine Person and then argues that God is a Person and nothing else, he goes upon insufficient data and is therefore wrong. If, on the other hand, someone realizes God as impersonal, formless and undifferentiated and preaches that God has no form, he also errs on the side of partial truth. It is only to the *Vijnāni*, the perfect devotee, that integral truth is revealed. It is he who possesses intimate knowledge of the Deity. The *Vijnāni* knows Him as both personal and impersonal. However, if God reveals Himself in the twofold way these revelations cannot exhaust Him. In other words, God in His ultimate being transcends both the personal and the impersonal. And He only assumes them by transcending them.

To repeat, what God Himself is no one can say.[20] But this much is certain that He reveals Himself as both personal and impersonal and is manifesting Himself in the things and beings of the world. Human logic of contradiction is born of human experience of empirical things. Logical rules and the laws of Nature are as nothing compared to the power of the divine Being. The Divine is the Lord of the universe. He creates, sustains and annihilates as He pleases. He is the maker of all things and all laws. No law can bind Him. We, in fact, cannot judge Him. We cannot say what He should do and what He should not, what He can and what He cannot do. Inscrutable are His ways. Nothing is impossible for Him. He can make the lame scale mountains; He can make a camel pass through the eye of a needle. All this is incomprehensible. God is omnipotent. Judge Him not by human standards.

Now to take up the third question. It may be contended that Ramakrishna contradicted himself when he spoke of the plane of the *Vijnāni* as a lower plane. For example, he said to Iswar Chandra Vidyāsāgar, "Even those who have realized the Absolute in the ecstasy of samādhi will yet come down by my Mother's will to a lower plane."[21] Again in an illuminating talk with Narendra Datta (later Swami Vivekananda) he went on to say, "Divine Incarnations and those who are nearest to Him have within their reach absolute knowledge in samādhi and at the same time come down from that height retaining their self and loving the Lord as father, mother, etc."[22] And he continued, "Much the same was the case with Prahlāda and Nārada.[23] They realized the Absolute; they realized too the spiritual forms of the Lord from a lower plane."[24]

One should remember that, though Ramakrishna repeatedly spoke of a lower spiritual plane, he never characterized it as unreal. But he could consistently speak—as he did—of the state of the *Vijnāni* as both higher and lower than that of the *Jnāni,* the knower of the Absolute. Let us then see what exactly he meant or could mean by the phrase "a lower spiritual plane." Clearly, he did not hold with the Vedāntic doctrine of *māyā,* which for him meant that in *nirvikalpa samādhi* the sādhaka becomes one with the Absolute and that in this state there is no consciousness of the "I" or the world. Ramakrishna told his hearers that God, who was identical with the Absolute, manifested Himself in the things and beings of the world and that the sādhaka knew this when through the grace of the Lord he came out of *nirvikalpa samādhi* with a purified ego. This being a state of supreme identity, we cannot feel or conceive anything or any state higher than it. No wonder, then, that the attainment of the Absolute is considered the highest realization from the point of view of the Advaita (Absolute) logic of life and experience.

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[20] *Gospel*, Vol. I, p. 150.
[21] *Op. cit.*, p. 112.
[22] *Op. cit.*, p. 321.
[23] Two ancient sages.
[24] *Op. cit.*, p. 322.

But, as Ramakrishna pointed out, it is often found that the sādhaka attains yet a higher state, that of the *Vijnāni* who returns from the transcendental unity of the Absolute to the unity immanent in the multiplicity. And this is a higher attainment than that of *nirvikalpa* or absolute identity on two distinct grounds. First, since *nirvikalpa samādhi* is a state of complete identity of the aspirant with the Absolute, there is no scope for any subjective enjoyment of the Supreme. There is simply the objective merging of the individual into *Brahman* ; as a drop of water goes into the sea, so the sādhaka slips into the Absolute. There can be no realization whatever in the strict sense, far less the knowledge that the Absolute—the Undifferentiated is realized. It is only when the sādhaka through the grace of the Lord comes out of that state with a purified ego that he has the sense of such realization.

One can only know the Relative as such when one has known the Absolute.[25] And in order to be aware that the

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[25] *Gospel,* Vol. II, p. 319.

Absolute is or has been realized the aspirant must return to the realm of the Relative. When he comes back he realizes that the Divine or the Absolute is manifesting in the universe, in himself and in everything. And as the result of it he is filled with supreme delight. The state in which the devotee appreciates that he has realized the Absolute is evidently a higher one than that in which he is completely merged into the Absolute. This state is that of the *Vijnāni*. But to come out of the state of identity is to transcend it. This the sādhaka does when his ego has been purified and restored to him, and with it he returns, not to the world he left behind, which seemed real enough in its own rights, but to the world in which everything appears to be a manifestation of the Absolute. Then in the state of the *Vijnāni* the sādhaka also realizes through the grace of God His spiritual forms about which He kept him in the dark in his quest of the Absolute. He now attains intimate knowledge of the Divine, and now knows that God is both personal and impersonal. To such a state God only brings a devotee if He so chooses. This, however, presupposes the realization of the state of Oneness. The sādhaka must plunge into the Undifferentiated before he becomes a *Vijnāni*.

The meaning of the phrase "a lower spiritual plane" when applied to the state of the *Vijnāni* has still to be explained. Ramakrishna likened the Absolute to the roof of a house, but he never said that the Undifferentiated is the sole reality and that all else is illusory. It is true that the things and beings of the world are transitory, but the world is none the less a vast array of facts and an endless flow of events in which the Supreme manifests Himself. The Absolute is the highest height, in the sense that as soon as the sādhaka reaches it he loses his individuality and differentiation ceases. If the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi* is conceived as higher than that in which the empirical world is manifested, it must be a state of absolute identity. On the other hand, if the plane of the *Vijnāni* is characterized as a lower spiritual plane, it is so only in the sense that therein differentiation is presented. The plane of the *Vijnāni* was often described by Ramakrishna as lower just because in it the sādhaka is confronted with phenomena. In some contexts he used the phrase "a lower plane" with reference to the state of the *Vijnāni*. But by this phrase he did not, in fact, he could not, mean that the *Vijnāni* ever remained in a state of lower spiritual experience.

The phrase "a lower plane" means simply the plane of differentiation. The state of the *Vijnāni* is, however, reckoned higher than that of absolute samādhi because differentiation forms part of the content of his experience. How can the *Vijnāni* sink to a level lower than that of absolute identity? If the sādhaka is brought out of the state of unity, he is kept on a plane where he realizes the Divine as manifesting in the universe, and whence he may often ascend to pure Identity and also descend again to differentiation as the manifestation of the Divine. It is now clear that, though the *Vijnāni* dwells on the plane of multiplicity, he is far removed from men of the world. From the ordinary point of view the world as a mass of facts is regarded as real and existing in its own rights. To the *Vijnāni,* however, everything is a mode or a manifestation of the Divine. We may say that the *Vijnāni* is he who returns to the lower plane of multiplicity. But he returns there to a realization higher than the superconscious state of the Undifferentiated.

As we have seen above, the lower levels of experience are determined by the location of the mind in the different nerve-centres situated in the lower regions of the human body. When the mind rises into the thousand-petalled lotus in the cerebrum it fades away with all differentiation and the sādhaka attains *nirvikalpa samādhi*. Now one may argue that when the latter comes out of this state his mind roams the centres below the heart. But what mind and what centres? The mind and the ego which the *Vijnāni* possesses or seems to possess are all purified, meaning that they are neither mind nor ego in our sense of the terms. Even his body is transformed. If the *Vijnāni* dwells in differentiation, it is not like common men, for he enjoys the differentiation as the manifestation of the One. He lives both in and out of the body at the same time. That is to say, in his bodily existence he is free ; in every phase of his existence he is ever united with the One ; he is simply a channel of divine activity. So it is futile to trace his empirical consciousness to the presence of his mind in this or that nerve-centre. To us it appears a mystery how the sādhaka comes out of *nirvikalpa samādhi,* and it is a far deeper mystery how he is maintained in his bodily existence after his overall attainment. As Ramakrishna pointed out, it all happens through the grace of the Lord, showing that God in His essential being is superpersonal and far transcends even the Absolute—the Undifferentiated and Impersonal.

CHAPTER VI

RAMAKRISHNA AND RELIGION

The development of science, particularly the theory of evolution in the nineteenth century, tended to undermine the foundation of religion. As the saying goes, a little learning is a dangerous thing. In the first flush of victory over the forces of Nature some scientists erroneously thought that they had mastered the whole universe. And it took long years to bring home to them that they were under an illusion. They now understand Newton's statement that he was only picking up pebbles on the shore of the ocean of knowledge. But there are still some die-hards, who hold that what cannot stand the scientific test belongs to the realm of fancy. Unaware of their limitations, they attempt to explain away the phenomenon of religion.

In Ramakrishna's time waves of scepticism and agnosticism stirred by scientific thought came to sweep the minds of those Indians who had received an English education at the newly-founded universities. Educated Indian youth grew sceptical of religion and the prevailing forms of worship. And the result was intellectual confusion and moral chaos. All around and all over the world there was indeed a challenge to religion, which Ramakrishna took up. He demonstrated by his life and experience that God was no figment and that religion was no fake.

Laplace said that he had scanned the whole sky, but found no God. This must have impressed the sceptics. They thought that if God were really the maker of the world and resided in Heaven, somewhere in the upper sky, he could be discovered by a high-range telescope. A sceptic once said, "If there is God, let him strike me dead here and now." If God is the supreme Being, who creates and sustains the universe, it is preposterous that man should suggest how He is to demonstrate His existence. God does not need to do so at any rate in the way suggested above. Anyway, in the time of Ramakrishna there was a legitimate demand for a demonstration of God's existence. But believers could not meet it by apologetics which can offer nothing by which sceptics can distinguish between fancy and fact. The demand for a demonstration of God's existence grew insistent.

Narendra Datta, later Swami Vivekananda, was one of a group of young Bengalis who lost their religious fervour by meeting religious teachers who had not actually realized or seen God. Narendra was a distinguished graduate of Calcutta University and was preparing for a learned profession. He was manifestly under the influence of Western science, particularly Spencer's agnosticism. This together with a lack of direction for spiritual life made his mind restless, and in the end he turned sceptical. However, his urge for a life of spirit was not quite extinct. He was, in spite of himself, vaguely longing to meet someone who could point the way to God.[1]

One day Narendra heard that there was a saint at Dakshineswar near Calcutta. This appealed to his imagination and he resolved to take a last chance to settle the issue about God with the help of a saint. And this saint was no other than Ramakrishna. Narendra met and talked to him in the house of Surendra Mitra. He was highly impressed by the Master. Ramakrishna then invited him to come to Dakshineswar, and he went there with Surendra. Narendra sat before the saint, sang some devotional songs and was later entertained with fruits and sweetmeats. After some time Ramakrishna took him aside and asked him to come one day alone. Narendra simply wondered at Ramakrishna and returned home with the impression that there was something wrong with the man. Nevertheless he returned, this time alone. As he sat by Ramakrishna's bed the latter suddenly touched the young man's shoulder with his right foot, and Narendra began to slip into a unique state. His sense of the "I" started to dissolve and his surroundings to fade into nothingness. He was frightened and cried out, "Hullo, what are you doing?" Ramakrishna realizing Narendra's state of mind touched him and he at once returned to normal. This time he left Dakshineswar under the impression that Ramakrishna was a hypnotist.

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[1] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. III, 6th edition, p. 346, Almora, 1948. Swamiji says, "When I was a boy here, in this city of Calcutta, I used to go from place to place in search of religion, and everywhere I asked the lecturer after having very big lectures, "Have you seen God?" The man was taken aback at the idea of seeing God, and the only man who told me, "I have", was Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and not only so, but he said, "I will put you in the way of seeing Him too"."

When Narendra went to Dakshineswar for the third time, the temple house was rather crowded. So Ramakrishna took him for a walk in the garden. Later when Narendra was resting Ramakrishna came near and touched him, and he was immediately plunged into deep samādhi—a superconscious state. This experience brushed away his doubts and relieved him of scepticism. He now felt that there was something extraordinary about Ramakrishna. He bowed down to the Master and paid homage seemingly on his own behalf, but really for sceptics of all times and countries.

Ramakrishna, indeed, talked a good deal about God. But he did not merely talk. He practised what he preached and made many see God face to face. To those who could receive he imparted spirituality by a mere sight or touch. Who could better defend God and religion against the onslaught of scepticism? The Master was a living defence of God. The truths enshrined in the spiritual lores of the world were verified afresh in the life and experiences of this master soul.

Now absolute scepticism cannot be answered, and is not worth refutation. An absolute sceptic denies God, and his chief interest lies in that denial. Even when challenged, he never stops to think, to verify through proper experience, whether God exists or not. There is, indeed, a psychology which is inspired by sordid worldly ideas. Ramakrishna told his hearers that true religious consciousness is a privilege enjoyed only by a few through the grace of God. Stocks and stones have no awareness, but plants live and animals are conscious, though they have no sense of God or of religion. Only man has the privilege of religious consciousness, though all men are not religious or equally so. While some are aware of the divine presence, others are only dimly conscious of it, while the rest are drowned in worldliness.

Ramakrishna explained all this with the help of homely examples. Men, he would say, could be broadly divided into four classes: (1) the worldly, (2) seekers after liberation, (3) the liberated, and (4) the eternally free.[2] Sages like Narendra are ever free, live the life of spirit and abide in perfect union with God. Nothing mean can touch them. Nevertheless, they sometimes take human birth and move among men to teach them the Way. The second class comprises those who have a conscious urge for spiritual things. They are afraid to be caught in worldly life and seek after Truth. The third class of men are those who sought, struggled and have just realized Truth, while the first class consists of those who have no consciousness of anything higher than empirical ends.

Ramakrishna brought out the distinction between one class and another by an example drawn from ordinary experience. Let me put it in my own words. Suppose a fisherman casts his net into a lake. Now all fish are not of the same kind. Some have an innate sense of the danger ahead and are too clever to be caught, but they are few in number. From the plop which the net makes when it strikes water they feel the danger and dart away. They symbolize the eternally free.

Some of the fish realize the danger rather late, yet in good time to escape. As soon as they find themselves in the net they leap over it and swim away. They represent the third class of men. Some, however, try their utmost but cannot escape. They are mere seekers. The rest remain complacent within the net without the least idea that they are caught, nor are they conscious of the fate that awaits them. These represent worldly men.

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[2] *Gospel*, Vol. I, pp. 61-64 ; *Kathāmrita* (in Bengali), Part I, iv, 2 ; i, 6.

Worldly men always seek empirical things which they consider to be the source of joy and happiness. Ramakrishna, like an astute logician, summed up what ordinary men ran after under two heads, woman and gold, that is, sex and wealth, which cover the basic needs of man. Being wholly given to sense-life, such men feel no need for religion, and become sceptical of God. They are not, however, eternally doomed. Scepticism is only a stage through which one can only pass by the grace of God.[3] He fills, if He pleases, even the mind of a sceptic with divine ecstasy. For us, however, it appears that purity of heart is the presupposition of faith. We come to believe in God when our minds are purged of all sordid ideas and selfishness.

The fourth class of men mentioned above are rather peculiar. When they incarnate in earthly bodies they are born with their innate consummate spiritual consciousness intact. Desire for sex or wealth cannot distract them and nothing can dislodge them from their height. They live to give guidance to and hold the light of Truth before their fellow men.

Ramakrishna explained the nature and status of the ever-free by a fascinating analogy from the Veda. The Homa is a bird that lives high up in the sky where it lays eggs which at once start to fall and while falling hatch out. The fledgelings continue to drop, but when close to the earth they open their eyes and in fear of being dashed to the ground they soar back up to their mother above. Such are those men who are eternally free. If they assume human birth, they do so for the good of the world. They are not affected by the conditions of birth and life, but retain intact their God-consciousness and live and act according to it. By their life, experiences and acts they bear witness to the fact that God is most real and that the realization of Him is the ultimate end of human life.

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[3] *Kathāmrita* (in Bengali), Part IV, xvi, 3.

But what is realization? and if religion is the way to experience of God, in what does religion consist? The answer often confuses even those who are blessed with faith or belief in God; and so Ramakrishna tried to clarify it in many of his discourses. Some say that fear is the source of religion, but the Master did not agree. He said: some talk of sin, and make much of it, implying that religion consists in repenting of past sins and refraining from committing fresh ones. Christians and Brāhmos, for instance, harp on this point. It seems that an ideal devotee is he who prays to God, saying "O Lord, I am a sinner. Forgive my sins."[4] This, however, is not entirely wrong, as it marks the beginning of religious life. But to think of oneself constantly as a sinner is bad as it tends to keep one back and impede one's spiritual progress.[5]

I think nobody would take Ramakrishna amiss. He never attacked any particular religion. All that he meant was that fear or the sense of sin only formed part of religious consciousness at its preliminary stage. We can see that this is so if we look back upon the history of religion and into the spiritual development of an individual. Whether fear is the source of religion is an old controversy, and there is no need for me to go into detail about it. It does not detract from the intrinsic value of religion to say that in the remote past fear played a large part in religious consciousness. Primitive men found their surroundings in many ways hostile to them, so that fear was one of the major conditions of their consciousness, and was certainly to be found in their feelings towards religion. History, however, shows that as religious consciousness developed and deep spiritual experiences were attained, fear was found to be a passing phase. At the developed stage God, the object of religion, was conceived as the ground and goal of the universe, and love of God was looked upon as the end of life and as the spring of true religion.

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[4] *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* Vol. I, p. 290.
[5] *Ibid.*

Evolutionists tell us that the things and beings of the world came to their present state through a long process of development. Biologists support this when they maintain that the human embryo at the successive stages of its development betrays forms that represent the major levels of the animal world. Much in the same way, the psychology of religious consciousness in the average individual often outlines the different stages and phases through which religion has evolved. They range from fear and the attitude of propitiation to love of God and ecstasy in communion with Him. It is therefore quite natural that when religious consciousness dawns on an individual he is first impressed by the distance between himself and the Deity and then overwhelmed by the sense of his imperfection against the all-perfect and omnipotent. And he prays to God that He forgive him his sin. This method of approach to God is valid and far from absurd. Yet it represents a lower stage of religious consciousness which was formulated into a dogma of Christianity.

Ramakrishna referred to Christians and Brāhmos, not in disparagement, but to show how the sense of sin is emphasized in religious practice. He only meant that we should cultivate higher attitudes and develop the conception that God is love, our Father, and the Ordainer of the universe. It is good for us to feel akin to God and to love Him. That is all. It is God's concern if we are to be saved. As He is omniscient it is not for us to tell Him that we are sinful. Again, the dogma of sin accentuates the difference between finite spirits and the Infinite, while the doctrine of love eliminates the gulf which we posit between ourselves and Him. Since the dogma of sin and the doctrine of love are contraries and cannot be combined, Ramakrishna was all for love of God.

Ramakrishna, however, emphasized repentance for past misdeeds. He said that one finds oneself on the path to God when one repents bitterly of one's evil doings. Repentance is catharsis. It cleanses the mind of all evil dispositions and tendencies and purifies the heart. Before the Bridegroom comes the house should be swept clean or possibly washed white. Dirty clothes must be discarded and new ones put on. Repentance, therefore, plays a major part in the beginning of the religious life of an ordinary individual. But it means much more than thinking that one is sinful, than praying that God forgive one's sin. Repentance consists in mental suffering from the sense of past misdeeds.

There is an age-old confusion between religion and philanthropy which can be traced to Comtean positivism and to a distorted view of some religious teaching. Auguste Comte sought to found a religion on a scientific basis. He repudiated metaphysics, historical religions and mysticism. According to him, all these tend to turn attention from the positive facts of the world to noumena that are all fiction. To him God as the Creator of the universe is a chimera and the only religion worth the name is that of humanity. The human race is a positive fact and the only worthy object of worship. And so true religion, according to Comte, consists in serving humanity by scientific knowledge.

The *Iśa Upaniṣad* states that one should not covet another's possession, but should enjoy life by sacrifice and unselfishness: in the Mahābhārata it is pointed out that religion is doing good to all beings;[6] and Christ's saying "Love thy neighbour as thyself" is well known. Some take these teachings out of their contexts and construct from them a so-called humanistic religion. They contend that altruism is the core of religion which consists in philanthropy and social service. If, however, we consider the contexts of these sayings, we find that they do not preach mere humanism. The *Iśa Upaniṣad*, for instance, opens with the assertion that the Divine pervades the universe, and then indicates what follows as a corollary. Therein we are enjoined to live in amity and love with our fellow beings because we are bound together by the unity of the One manifesting itself in the things and beings of the world. Similarly the text from the Mahābhārata means that religion cannot be indifferent to the good of beings, while Jesus Christ's saying is an exhortation to his devotees to fashion their life according to the belief that God is love and is the Father of us all. He pointed out that love of God was not to be confined to the devotee's heart, but must be expressed in earthly life in the form of mutual love and fellowship. It ought now to be clear that the texts under consideration do not confuse humanism with religion, but teach that it is an ancillary to true religion. If anybody loves God, he cannot be indifferent or hostile to His creatures, to his fellow men. So, like Jesus, the Buddha insisted on non-violence and Sri Chaitanya asked his disciples to cultivate kindness and compassion along with love of God.

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[6] *Śāntiparba*, chap. 261.

There are different kinds of devotees, whose attitude towards the world and their fellow beings varies according to their conceptions of the Deity. Ramakrishna spoke of three different kinds of religious men. As he pointed out, some say that God is far away in Heaven, some that He resides in the heart; and others that He is everywhere and in everything. Ramakrishna regarded the last mentioned group as the highest.[7]

Indeed, if God is conceived as the Father living far away and far above in Heaven, we can develop kindness and sympathy, or at most neighbourly and brotherly feeling towards our fellow beings. If, on the other hand, God is conceived as residing in the innermost recess of our heart, the devotee would naturally try to withdraw from the world and become an introvert. The result is apathy for social life and indifference to one's fellow beings. But it is not for a man to withdraw completely from ordinary life, and the attempt to do so often does irreparable damage to his body and mind. Further a religious life lived in abstraction develops in the devotee an abhorrence for society, which is set at naught. This in turn leads to the disruption of the social whole and the ruin of human culture. As a result some people argue that religion is a drug taken by men who wish to forget their duties.

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[7] *Kathāmrita* (in Bengali), Part III, viii, 1.

Ramakrishna pointed out that there is no opposition between life and religion, which is a way or attitude that may cover the whole life inasmuch as God is everywhere. He, though infinite, manifests Himself in finite things and beings. So, when we pick on any thing or being we pick on God. And we can best serve God if we serve man, because man is the crown of Creation.

But it does not mean that religion is merely social service or morality which involves the sense of an intrinsic value. There is, however, nothing in our moral consciousness that can explain this sense of value. In moral life we seek perfection which appears to us as an ever-receding ideal. And the ideal of perfection ,that determines our actions in moral life only becomes intelligible in the light of religion. In religion one finds that what masquerades as perfection in moral consciousness is prospective union with God who is the ultimate source of the universe. In the faith that God is everywhere social life, involving as it does duties, rights and responsibilities, takes on a new aspect. We find that in serving our near and dear ones as well as our fellow beings we serve the Deity. We have to develop this sense. The service of man then becomes a way of approach to God, a form of worship.

One day Ramakrishna went on a pilgrimage with Mathur Babu. On their way they came across some extremely poor men and women with their children. The sight of these famished people in tattered rags overwhelmed Ramakrishna. He resolved to see them fed and clad and would not move an inch until this was done. That was an important incident by which he showed that God was to be worshipped not only in images, but also in the poor who need food, clothing, houses, and education. He said that God was everywhere, especially in human beings.

He also pointed out the absurdity involved in the idea that we should be *kind* to others. The word conveys the sense that the people who are kind to their less fortunate fellow beings are superior to them. Kindness, though a good moral quality, implies egoism which goes ill with religious life. Ramakrishna even went further than the precept "Love thy neighbour as thyself". He asked devotees to serve those who need service as manifestations of God. A devotee should not necessarily be indifferent to society. In the *Bhagavadgītā* Sri Krịṣṇa exhorts Arjuna to act in such a way that he may at the same time do good to himself and to the world at large: in other words, he should take his duties and responsibilities as worship of God. This is the secret of all secrets. It shows how religious or spiritual life can be built on the basis of social life.

People in Ramakrishna's time forgot this teaching and became self-centred in religious life. Some even went to extremes. For them love of God was compatible with hatred of men. For them God was furthest from the world. So they prayed to Him at the top of their voices to make themselves audible. But God is too near, and one need not shout in one's prayer.

It is senseless to remain apathetic or hostile to one's fellow beings if one meditates on God as the indwelling spirit in man. Some in search of God leave society and go to the hills and jungles. Religion then appears anti-social, whereas it grows and thrives in society. Further a human being as a rational animal is a social individual. In religious life he cannot afford to be otherwise, far less anti-social, although the object of his devotion transcends society. There are doubtless different attitudes in religion, and they often conflict with one another. They must be synthesized on the basis of an overall realization. Ramakrishna did so by insisting that God is everywhere. If we persuade ourselves to act on this faith, we are not to seek God in jungles and hills, and there is no need to turn away from life. Wherever we go our imperfections and impurities cling to us. There is the rub. The problem, in short, is: How purge away the impurities from our hearts?

Here I must add a word of caution. One may think that according to Ramakrishna, the service of our fellow beings is the only true form of religion. At the cost of repetition it must be said that according to the Master, the service of men as manifestations of God is only a way, not the whole of religion. The aspirant accepts in faith that humanity is the major manifestation of God, but he has still to realize it. Since, however, the main object of religion is God and love of God, he must cultivate that love to realize Him.

But love of, even belief in, God is not possible for a man filled with impurities and imperfections. These are egoism, the vanity born of wealth, caste or creed, and selfishness, which must be cleared away in order that belief in God may be planted on our mind. Even those who are ordinarily considered religious believe in Him intermittently and are often left in doubt. As Ramakrishna said, the belief becomes firm to the extent that the devotee concerned cleanses his mind. And the easiest way of getting rid of sordidness is to serve others. Service of men irrespective of caste, creed, and race would break the circle of narrow ideas in which the aspirant has been nurtured, and bring about an expansion and a transformation of his feelings. All this is purification of the mind and the heart. It is understandable why Ramakrishna emphasized the service of men. But this is only the beginning. Ramakrishna sought to make it clear to his hearers that religion was based on belief in God and love of God, and that these would only come to a sincere soul.

Religion has obviously two sides—the outer and the inner, the former being worship, the latter belief in, and love of, God. And the outer aspect is the expression of the inner. Belief in God and the feelings that flow from it find expression in prayers, manifold rites and ceremonies, and the outer aspect, like the inner, involves elaborate symbolism, which necessitates places of worship. Ramakrishna expanded the meaning of the term "worship" to include the service of men. Ordinarily we try to collect our mind by sitting still, closing our eyes and turning inward. This is subjective contemplation.[8] Ramakrishna told his devotees that it must be supplemented by objective contemplation which consists in fixing upon things and beings and thinking that God is manifested in them. Indeed it is far easier for neophytes to practise objective rather than subjective contemplation which presupposes much power of abstraction.

Ramakrishna, however, did not minimize but attached great importance to prayer as the expression of an ardent spirit, not the outpouring of an idle soul. Indeed it expresses longing for God and at a high reach of spiritual life it is communion with the Divine. Truly, then, the more we pray the more intense becomes our longing for God, and the more we long for Him the more we pray. When we do so we turn away from worldly life, though for a short while, and direct our mind towards God. We may say that prayer tends to make us God-minded. Ramakrishna said that an aspirant must pray daily for faith and love; for, as he pointed out, it was thus that the devotee could hope to rise to realization. He asserted, and rightly, that ordinary people were given to sex and wealth. There is little or no time for them to think of God and there is little room for Him in their minds. So many of them seek to justify their way by denying God and by denouncing religion altogether. That God exists is a matter of faith or realization. So the sceptic's denial affects neither religion nor the object of religion. To the sceptic Ramakrishna threw out the challenge "Come and see". But God cannot be seen like an object of the world but only when one's spiritual vision is opened. To this end we must turn away from sex and wealth which distract our minds. There is, of course, one end which is common to all, happiness. Though different men conceive it in their different ways, the majority agree that it is to be found in possession and enjoyment. But these, though of value up to a point, keep the human spirit down. Attachment to wealth as the means of transient sensuous pleasures covers up the innate sense in man that God is the value above all values.

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[8] *Kathāmrita,* part II, xv, 2.

Is there then no hope for the mass of men? Do they, to be religious, have to renounce the world? No. Although Ramakrishna stressed detachment, he did not advocate complete renunciation for all. On the contrary, he indicated that if worldly people adopted the right attitude, they could proceed towards God by discharging their normal duties and responsibilities.

Every human being is born and nurtured in society and has duties to some family, country and nation, the performance or avoidance of which affects his development. Further, if he flees from society he still has to earn a living by work. What then does he gain by a hasty renunciation which does not make for dispassion or detachment? Ramakrishna would point out that the main thing about religion is faith and love of God. If a person has both, he would be free from fear and would cultivate faith and love by prayer, holy company and a proper discharge of his duties.

Social relations are objective and determine for the most part our empirical being. So they are binding upon us all. We do not enter into them of our own accord nor can we give them up when we begin to dislike them. Once we find ourselves in this or that social relation, we have to live it out. There is or should be no falling back from this. One day Ramakrishna said about renunciation: "Don't think that the parents are of no account. In fact you cannot make progress on the spiritual path without the blessings of your parents. We owe our body to them and much of our mind as well. So we must not displease them in any way. We must look after them, especially when they become old and disabled, and sustain them. If in our quest of Truth we leave them in a helpless state, we sin against society and God. For example, if a man marries, he has his duties by his wife. If he has children, he has to maintain them, educate them and make provision for their future.[9]

As Ramakrishna pointed out, we become religious in the true sense if we install God in place of our little self, that is, if we work in His name with absolute sincerity. All our activities must be God-centred. We must act on the idea that in performing our multifarious duties we serve Him and do His work. That is the way we ordinary men are to follow. Such procedure would in the end prove fruitful and would lead to faith and love of God, which are all-important, in the sense that they are the essentials of religious life. It is enough if we have them. There is no need for hurry. Everything has its course and time. We can only attain to union with God by spiritual effort. We have to work hard, then, to deepen our consciousness and wait patiently for the final plunge.

Ramakrishna did not omit to mention that there often come extraordinary souls who are exceptions to the rule. Some in their nature are God-intoxicated with an innate and intense love of Truth. And as they are seized with a divine frenzy they become rather oblivious of themselves, their surroundings, duties and responsibilities. That is a supreme state, and in it all work drops off as the aspirant transcends the level of ordinary life. For him God is the absolute value and everything else is as nothing. In him renunciation is immediate and complete.

Such souls are few and far between. In history we can point to only three or four such exuberant souls like Gautama, Jesus and Sri Chaitanya. Gautama was a prince and lacked nothing, yet when the longing for Truth seized him he could not hold back. Before the dynamic urge of his inner being earthly love and responsibilities sank into insignificance. The grace and beauty of his wife and the lovely face of his new-born baby could not prevent him. Jesus was too full of God to follow the beaten track, and he rose straight above mundane life. It was much the same with Sri Chaitanya. He was under a divine spell and renounced the world despite his duties to his widowed mother and newly married wife. He was overwhelmed with God-visions, seeing Him all around, within himself and without. For him all was Vāsudeva.

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[9] *Kathāmrita*, IV, xxiv, 1.

The lives and teachings of these colossal spirits have profoundly influenced mankind. But we often misconstrue their message. We are apt to think that, as they renounced the world, spiritual life is apart and that we can only attain it by complete renunciation. This is a mistake, for it puts the cart before the horse. As Ramakrishna urged, renunciation presupposes faith and love of God. Without them it is hollow. Nowadays some only renounce the world in search of an easy life in *ashrams* or monasteries. Others flee life because they find it too difficult. Renunciation on their part is a mockery indeed. They do good neither to themselves nor to anybody else. Instead they shirk their duties and thereby set a bad example to their fellow men. Ramakrishna depreciated this sort of renunciation and urged upon his devotees the need to have faith and love.

It is, of course, necessary that every man performs the duties appropriate to his station in life. But that is only morality which a religious man transcends as soon as he takes God as the ultimate end of life and of all that he does. So the more he realizes that God is the value of values the more detached from worldly things he becomes. This progressive realization finally brings dispassion and poise to his mind. True, dispassion is an attitude that touches the depth of one's being and is experienced by the devotee. But it concerns the inner consciousness of the individual and is not communicable to others. Dispassion, therefore, commendable as it is, remains abstract.

It is often difficult to distinguish between a person truly dispassionate and detached in his outlook and another who is a worldly man in the accepted sense of the term. Hence dispassion and detachment must be made explicit in the outward actions and articulate ways of life. But how and by whom? Those who are best fitted to do it are the fourth class of men mentioned above. As Ramakrishna averred, they are perfect and eternally free. They nevertheless take birth on earth only to teach mankind, to show what religion and renunciation are like. They live in absolute renunciation and dispassion. They transcend sex and remain uncontaminated by the touch of wealth.[10] All this is beautifully expressed in Swami Vivekananda's *Song of the Sannyasin*:

> "Truth never comes where lust and fame and greed
> Of gain reside. No man who thinks of woman
> As his wife can ever perfect be."[11]

Those who are ever perfect live in God and for God. Their renunciation is both mental and physical and as such is complete. They are true sannyasins, and their life is a guiding light to mankind. The saffron clothes they wear are nothing except as the symbol of inner peace, of purity of mind, heart and character in those who wear them. The sannyasin is our ideal and must be above every mean and sordid thing. So his life is one of a hard discipline. True sannyasins therefore are no drag, as some think, upon society. They, indeed, have a noble rôle to perform. They hold up before us in a concrete form the ideal which we are to realize in our individual life and experience.

These are human considerations. As we are rational beings, we proceed by way of means and ends. If we ideate God-realization as the end of life, we conceive, and we have to, a concatenation of ways and means leading to the attainment of the ultimate end. But there is a limit. Whatever the details we may work out in regard to our approach to

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[10] *Kathāmrita*, Part IV, xiv, 1.

[11] *Op. cit.*, Part V, Appendix, vii ; Vivekananda: *Poems, pp.* 5-6, Almora, 1947.

God and whatever the path we may choose, we cannot attain God by our effort alone. As Ramakrishna asserted, ultimately the whole thing depends upon the grace of God.[12] It is open to Him to raise any one of us from the mire of mundane life or to keep us as we are now. If His grace descends upon us we rise. Failing that we sink. But we need not despair. God's grace is ever manifest in His Creation. It was by an act of grace that God implanted in man the innate sense of value, the sense of a supreme Being at the back of the universe. It is definitely by His will that there have been so many different religions which to a great extent have moulded human culture and civilization.[13] That a man could ever have a longing for God is proof that His grace has descended upon him. Grace is none the less God's affair. We on our part only strive and keep ourselves clean and long for the far-off event, union with Him.

At any rate our approach to God must be methodical. Ramakrishna, therefore, enumerated six distinct steps.[14] The first is keeping holy company. Man is a social being, and there is in him a tendency to imitate his fellow beings in his actions and ideas. So it is imperative that everything good and noble be placed before a person in order that he may imbibe ennobling ideas and follow right principles in his life. Holy men are all for God and have either realized or are just striving to attain Him. Naturally, if one constantly keeps their company one will be inspired by their ideas and way of life. Holy company awakens religious consciousness in the individual concerned or quickens it if it is already there in him.

The second step is aspiration for higher values and the highest. As our inner being is chastened by holy company, we come to be aware of values above the empirical. We ordinarily attach value to those things which we need most for the sustenance of the body. But when our consciousness deepens we see that we cannot live by bread alone. We feel that we are more than mere body, and we inevitably long to realize our self as spirit. This is a distinct step towards union with God.

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[12] *Op. cit.*, Part I, iv, 7.
[13] Part IV, xx, 3.
[14] *Op. cit.*, Part I, viii, 2; xii, 5; xv, 2.

There is, then, a third step, which is whole-hearted devotion to the Deity. Every man is born to a religion which has a social colouring. The content of every religion, in short, involves some definite idea of God and of the ultimate state of realization. These conceptions are important. If we are to progress along the path of spiritual life we have to hold on to our belief with complete devotion to the ideal that we cherish. But in religious life the ideal pursued is not the same for all. It is, of course, true to say that God is the object of all religions. The fact, however, remains that this one end itself is delineated differently in the different religions. It is desirable that each group follows its ideal with faith and love. All this is needed for individual progress and perfection, but does not or should not lead to any conflict; for the different religions in their different ways make for the same object, God. Religions as distinct from one another are for the most part determined by social and topographical conditions and relate to individual tastes and temperaments. Religious progress, in fact, depends on the purity of the heart and the devotion with which one follows one's chosen ideal.

The fourth step is "speechless wonder at the thought of God." This is indicative of inner development in the aspirant and really marks the beginning of true religion which is more a matter of experience than of formal rites and rituals. At this stage the aspirant rises to the borderland of the mystical world and has the first faint touch of the Divine. He is seized with a sense of a mysterious presence which he cannot quite grasp and from which he cannot disentangle himself. He is baffled in his attempt to comprehend it, is none the less irresistibly drawn towards it and is overwhelmed by strange feelings.

There is yet a higher stage, the fifth, which is reached after God-vision. When devotion becomes intense and culminates in God-realization, the devotee finds himself in a state of ecstasy, in which he loses control over his body. He becomes an unusual phenomenon, now laughing, now weeping, and now dancing like a mad man. No wonder, then, that ignorant people take divinely-inspired men for lunatics. But this stage is not easy to attain. One can do so only by conquering the cravings of the flesh through the grace of God. Such a state of divine madness is, however, natural to Incarnations.

There is a still higher stage comprising the most intense love of God. Devotion in its deepening makes for various mystical experiences on the part of the devotee and in the long run poises him in deepest love of God. This stage is the peak of spiritual love and is marked by two fundamental characteristics. In the first instance, the devotee forgets all about the world and all empirical values cease to have any attraction for him. Secondly, he is so engrossed in God that he becomes forgetful even of his own self including the body. This is the supreme state, and an average devotee cannot attain it.

Holy company, as has already been stated, nurtures faith and belief and quickens religious fervour. There is yet another factor which plays a very important rôle in religious life, namely pilgrimage, which is just travel to holy places. A place is hallowed by its association with the life and doings of a saint or sage. It may be that the latter is dead and gone, but he has left much behind him. The scene of his life still remains covered with the sanctifying dust from his feet; the whole atmosphere there continues surcharged with his ennobling ideas and lifelong sādhanā. It is natural that such holy places should stimulate religious consciousness in those who visit them.

In every religion much importance is attached to holy places and periodical pilgrimage to them. Thus Jerusalem and the Jordan are to Christians the holiest of places. Mecca by its association with Hajrat Mohammed is to Moslems

God's abode on earth. To Hindus Brindāvan and Banaras are places apart, and many take a vow to live there in their old age in the belief that they are the gateways to Heaven; and so on. Some laugh at the whole matter of pilgrimage. They point out that it is simply a waste of money and energy. There is, indeed, an element of truth in this contention. But one should not unthinkingly dismiss it. As Ramakrishna told his devotees, it is no good visiting holy places if you have no faith or love. One should only go on a pilgrimage when one has attained to firm belief in God.[15] Only the lovers of God profit thereby. To those lacking in the spiritual sense all places are alike. They may go to one place or another for a change, or in quest of health, or to study art and history there. As their attitude is religiously neutral, they do not find anything anywhere which may minister to their spirit. Ramakrishna, therefore, insisted that one should first of all have faith and love. According to him, holy places really are pastures on which the spirit of the aspirant feeds.

There is, however, a limit to pilgrimage. It is not absolutely necessary, although it is of vital importance to beginners in spiritual life.

Ramakrishna spoke of two kinds of devotees. There are some, and they are mostly neophytes, who remain restless in mind and travel far and wide visiting holy places. There are others, and they are much advanced in spirituality, who have seen enough of men and things and have sufficient spiritual experience to realize that all places alike are holy. Such devotees then settle down somewhere and continue their spiritual practices in peace and delight. When a devotee rises to the height of realization he sees God everywhere and in everything. For him pilgrimage loses much of its meaning. He, however, does not minimize its importance, but often goes on pilgrimage in order to show the way to his fellow beings.

Now it is well to note a very important point. Spirituality is often confused with possession of occult powers, and religion with occultism. It is recorded in yogic literature that eightfold power accrues to the aspirant on his way to the spiritual goal. He finds himself possessed of extraordinary gifts, such as to make himself microscopic in size or immensely large, to become light as a feather and fly at ease through the sky, to be at several places at the same time, to be clairvoyant, clairaudient, and so on. But we are told that these powers are so many obstacles in the way of the aspirant. They capture his imagination, deflect him from his objective and in the long run lead to his degradation.

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[15] *Kathāmrita,* Part III, iii, 2.

Ramakrishna brought all this home to the minds of his devotees by a short story.[16] There was once a great saint who by yoga attained occult powers. One day God in the guise of a sannyasin told the saint that he had heard much about the latter and his achievement. At that moment an elephant passed by and the sannyasin said to the saint, "Sir, you can certainly kill this elephant if you like." "Yes", replied the saint, and taking a handful of dust, he uttered some incantation over it and then threw it over the elephant, which instantly dropped down dead. The sannyasin marvelled at the saint's miraculous power, and the saint felt much flattered. The sannyasin then said, "Well, Sir, can you now bring the elephant back to life?" And the reply received was "Yes, this also I can do." The saint again scattered some mystical dust over the animal which forthwith rose. The sannyasin was all the more astonished, but asked one plain question: "What after all do you gain by killing the elephant and bringing it back to life again?" Saying this, the sannyasin disappeared, and the question remained unanswered. We for our part cannot understand how such an act, supernatural as it was, could ever help the saint's spiritual progress.

Ramakrishna cited some more cases. There was once on the sea-shore a great yogi possessed of occult powers. One day a violent storm broke out and was causing him much hard-ship. So, he said, "Let the storm stop", and it did so sending a ship in sails to the bottom of the sea. A great loss of life and property resulted, and the whole responsibility for it rested on the saint. So an occult power, far from doing good, may do positive harm to the person who possesses it. There was again another who practised yoga for long years and acquired the power of walking on water. But what value had it? It was worth only one pice, the price of crossing a river by ferry. Many years and much effort had been wasted on a trifle. Then there is a kind of yoga known as Haṭha Yoga, which is mainly concerned with the purification of the body. We are told that by long persistent practice we can control our vital functions and so acquire extraordinary powers. That is, however, a different matter and has nothing to do with spirituality or spiritual life. Supernatural powers accrue to the aspirant in the course of his spiritual progress. They are, however, only accidental features to which the devotee should not pay attention. If employed for empirical purposes, they make for egoism, pride and the aspirant's eventual fall.

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[16] *Op. cit.*, Part II, xiv, 2.

Nevertheless, miraculous powers can be wielded to advantage by Incarnations. As we have seen, an Incarnation is God Himself in the form of man. In human form God retains His divinity intact, and there can be no question of degradation regarding Him. Incarnations on appropriate occasions do display miraculous powers. But the greatest miracle of all is spiritual healing which consists in transforming another's being by a look or touch. Such a power is discernible only in an Incarnation.

Now one may ask: If the prime object of religion is God, how can we know whether a person has realized Him or not? As Ramakrishna pointed out, there are some positive signs of God-realization. One who has done so often appears inert as a stone, or talks, laughs and weeps like a mad man or a child. Physicians mistake this divine frenzy for a malady and psychologists for neurosis—an effect of repressing the sex impulse. But they do not know. The whole thing, in fact, is beyond their scope. In Ramakrishna's words, when a person attains spiritual realization his whole being, including the body, is convulsed and is like a hut into which an elephant has entered. His body and mind are subjected to a very heavy strain. It is no wonder that an aspirant at the higher reaches of spiritual experience often shows bodily and mental disorder. But this is only a symptom of inner growth, not of insanity. It is no use speaking about neurosis, sex and the rest with regard to spiritual figures, because, as we find, God-vision brings about a complete change in them. As Ramakrishna said, the devotee who has seen God is transfigured, finds himself enveloped in bright light, feels unspeakable joy and is never assailed by doubt.[17]

Each of us has natural inclination towards worldly pleasures. But the beatific vision of God is antithetical to sense-life. We cannot have both. We expend much of our energy in pursuit of sensuous ends. We cannot consequently concentrate upon a thing like spiritual value, the realization of which requires our whole fund of energy inasmuch as our mind in its downward movement has to be arrested and attuned to higher life. Spiritual discipline is therefore so designed that we may gradually collect our mind which is scattered over ephemeral things and turn it towards Truth. Further, as has been indicated above, in the state of God-realization the body and mind of the devotee concerned are strained to a degree. Hence the need for conservation of energy. It goes without saying that much energy is expended in sex-life. So the aspirant is to exercise restraint upon the sex impulse. Ramakrishna told his hearers that one intent upon God-realization must observe absolute continence.[18] Religion is, indeed, a way of life and is to be built upon a solid foundation. This is *brahmacharyya* or continence whereby we conserve energy and keep up the urge in us for God, without which religion, becoming a bundle of dogmas and fancies, begets fanaticism and bigotry.

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[17] *Op. cit.*, V, iii, 2.
[18] *Op. cit.*, IV, xii, 2.

CHAPTER VII

SYNTHESIS OF RELIGIONS IN RAMAKRISHNA

The advent of science has opened up a new vista to mankind. Scientific inventions have gone a long way to save physical labour and have reduced to the minimum the distance that separates one place from another. The easy modes of transport by land, sea, and air are bringing the peoples of the world into increasingly closer touch with one another. Contact is clearly taking place in a multitude of ways.

It is no exaggeration to say that the nations of the world now find themselves in much the same conditions in which men lived before the beginning of society. Like primitive men, nations are much impressed by their differences and so come into conflict with one another. And there is the vital problem of how build a confederation out of the jarring units—the different nations of the world. It is, however, up to the nations to rise out of the welter of confusion into which they have fallen in a manner which is in keeping with their heritage.

It augurs well for the future of the world that internationalism is already upon us. It is a sign that in spite of ourselves we are moving towards a united world. It is, however, pointed out that all talk about internationalism is meaningless and that the sooner it is stopped the better. Indeed, in some countries, cosmopolitans and pacifists are looked upon as visionaries and treated as traitors to their countries. In Nazi Germany, for example, all cosmopolitan ideas were sacrificed on the altar of grim nationalism. National prosperity, purity of blood and world domination were placed before the Germans as their main objectives. By intense propaganda the Nazi leaders instilled into the minds of their followers narrow patriotism and swept away all pacifist ideas. There is no denying that a genuine form of internationalism prevailed in the world after the first World War. But during the second one it became swayed by power politics. However, after the defeat of the Germans and the Japanese, internationalism again came into its own. And a world organization—the United Nations—was set up with world unity as its ultimate aim.

Now contact between the major races and nations of the world has taken place on more than one level. There have been cultural exchanges between the scientific West and the East. Some intellectuals have been and still are collaborating in bringing to light the elements common to different cultures and are thereby paving the way to a better world order to which idealists aspire. This has given a fillip in the field of research to comparative studies of which comparative religion is the most important; for it is through religious aspirations and experiences that the highest achievements of a race are revealed. It is in religious lore and spiritual literature that the highest tradition of a nation is preserved. Naturally we can expect much in the way of mutual understanding and fellowship from comparative studies in this field. But here too there is still scope for conflict.

In a comparative study one may be eager to extol the religion one professes and to establish it as superior to any or all others. Thus a Christian is likely to see more clearly than ever before why he is one, a Hindu why he should reject all other religions, and a Mohammedan may glory in the unity of his Godhead and universal brotherhood. All this, however, is one-sided and due to prejudice. Even eminent philosophers are found to suffer from such infirmity. For example, Hegel found only in his own creed, Christianity, the complete embodiment of the idea of religion.

However, comparative studies are not on that account useless. In many cases they end in accentuating the difference between religions, which is in fact the starting ground. Yet they have gathered together a mass of material which, properly manipulated, might have yielded a better result. But everyone is not fitted for this arduous task which requires a generous mind and a benevolent mood. Some have succeeded in picking out the pithy utterances of different religious teachers and have got at the core of mystical experiences as enshrined in spiritual lores the world over. They have pointed out that the difference between one religion and another is mainly due to their respective environments and to the different technical terms in which the religious experiences of their devotees are expressed. Such studies indeed represent a synthesis which is attainable through intellectual analysis. But, truly viewed, they only end in reducing the initial difference to a colourless identity.

Such studies start with an attempt not to explain but to explain away the difference between one religion and another. The result may be satisfying to the seeker concerned and is calculated to inspire a tolerant attitude in him and others. But it ends in oversimplification. The investigator makes so much of the common element or elements that he ignores the features of the religions as distinctive disciplines. Sifting from each of them a selfsame doctrinal content does serve to allay the suspicion and superciliousness that consume the minds of their votaries. But with this alone one cannot combat the forces that oppose religion. So, even if we admit that religion as such is an institution with which humanity cannot dispense, we hardly find anything to justify the position that each creed has a purpose to fulfil, and a promise of fulfilment.

Comparative religion as a systematic study is said to be of recent origin. But, as we have seen in a previous chapter, it is as old as the Gnostic systems of philosophy. The term "Gnosticism" covers a wide field of philosophic thought and mysticism which was developed during the first and the second century of the Christian era. In this connexion, as far as India is concerned, two names are worthy of mention. In the nineteenth century Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen were the first Hindus to encourage comparative religion by analyzing the scriptural texts of the different Faiths. Anyway, through cultural contact between the peoples of the world the old study has now been renewed in the West, but has led to conflict on the side of the West.

Religious teachers and preachers hailing from Europe and America at first found nothing worthy in Eastern religions and were anxious to convert everyone to their Faith. It might be that they were staunch followers of Marcion who found in the conception of God as Love the key point of the superiority of Christianity over heathen religions. Perhaps their conviction that Christianity was the only path to the Deity and that Jesus was the only Saviour of mankind made them eager to save the Eastern peoples by admitting them into the fold. Of recent years, however, a change has come over some Christian thinkers. They now find it worth while to pause and ponder over other religions and to see whether there is anything worthy in them. But it seems that they are not yet prepared to give them an equal status with Christianity. They still look askance at Eastern Faiths.

On the other hand, some very eminent among them openly want to install Christianity as a World Faith, although they are inclined to incorporate in it whatever valuable elements they find in other religions. But such an attitude, sympathetic towards the East though it is, betrays a fragmentary approach to the problem of the religions, which is inspired by the idea that one particular variety may be superior to the rest and by itself can provide the technique of spiritual advance for all. This is the imperialistic idea in the sphere of religion and is analogous to economic or political exploitation. As an intellectual analysis of the content of a religion must end in bias or prejudice, an intellectual approach to the subject is bound to be defective.

Religion is essentially practical. In its earlier stages practice was far more pronounced than belief, which was certainly part of the content of religion. Although belief in a developed religion is rather explicit or articulate, the practical discipline still remains the more important, and therein belief as apart from practice is an abstraction. So, if we want to understand the different creeds, we have to make a practical approach ; we must live a religion in order to see whether or not it is spiritually efficacious.

Ramakrishna, therefore, was not satisfied with an external view of the religions. Wanting to go to the root of the problem he plunged into experiments of experience with the different religious disciplines with a view to determining whether they would lead to God. In the annals of the world he was the first to do so. In short, he sought a synthesis of religions through spiritual experience, not through vain talk about it. It pained him to see that animosity and hatred marked the relationship between men in their religious life, and he sought to show them that there was no cause for quarrel about the value and status of the religions in relation to one another.

There was, however, a formidable difficulty to overcome. When one reaches the peak of spiritual experience, one does not presumably perceive from the height the differences left behind. Besides, one may be too much absorbed in the ecstasy of one's realization to refer back to a religious ideal other than one's own. Or, if anybody at that stage cares to review other religions, all that he avers may be a mere concession to other devotees. And he may just end by saying that the practices followed by the latter together with the names and attributes formulated by them in their attempt to grasp the nature of the supreme Being are so many different approaches to the realization of the ideal he has realized, i.e. to his chosen Godhead. But in this view there is little or no recognition of the autonomy of each religion in respect of either ideal or practice.

It may, however, be contended that, though spiritual experience is attained by following a particular discipline, the height reached may well be a meeting-place of many paths. It is perhaps true to say so, but it means that the meeting-point as such is itself a content or part of the content of the experience of the sādhaka (aspirant) concerned at his height. An imaginative analysis of the position to which mystics climb may afford us an alternative to what has been stressed above. If one has already attained mystical ecstasy and become one with Reality, one then hardly needs to distinguish between the different paths which *bona fide* mystics have traversed. And there is nothing or none else to distinguish. A mystic only attains his goal after he has taken his feet off the path he has trodden and his hands off the crutch on which he has so far leaned. The sphere of supreme bliss is really a region apart, and any *a priori* deduction of a path that could or can lead to it is impossible on the part of the mystic who has realized Reality.

In the life and teaching of Ramakrishna, however, we come on something unique. We have on record the lives of many mystics who after their ascent to supreme bliss descended to bestow their blessings on mankind. But in Ramakrishna we find a good deal more. He began from the bottom rung of the ladder of a religious discipline and after having reached the highest Being came down to communicate his experiences to his fellow beings. He was not content, however, with one-way realization. He took upon himself the hazardous task of experimenting with the ideals and practices of the chief religions of the world—Islam, Christianity, and various Hindu cults—under the guidance of *gurus* (spiritual guides) representing different religious paths.

It is, of course, quite natural to call this idle curiosity. But we should not forget that Ramakrishna had already reached the stage where he realized the truth of the saying of Sri Kriṣṇa—"That is the supreme state reaching which the sādhaka does not consider any other state worth his while." We cannot comprehend the agony Ramakrishna suffered when he tried out the experiments. Though he attained to the highest state to which a man can aspire, yet he came out of it and descended to a lower or even the lowest religious discipline, worship with the help of gross symbols. Foreseeing a new era of civilization he sought to remove the major obstacles in its path.

Such an interpretation of Ramakrishna's treatment of religion may not be acceptable to all. In any case none can miss the fact that for the sake of humanity he suffered a "sea of anguish". It was his boundless love of mankind that urged him to undertake such nerve-racking experiments. His was indeed a colossal spiritual capacity; within an incomprehensibly short time he attained to the realization of the cherished ideal in his experiment with each religion.

Now one should be slow to interpret these experiments as a study in comparative religion. As I have already tried to show, comparative religion at its best is only understanding intellectually the structural affinity or otherwise between different creeds and their origin. Clearly, then, it cannot lead to the experience or experiences on which the major religions are based because intellectual analysis or synthesis is indifferent whether one religion or another with its technique can lead to the realization of its cherished ideal. With an intellectual approach realization remains an open question. Ramakrishna's attitude, on the contrary, was far deeper. He realized the religions and showed by his experiences that the forms under which God was conceived and sought were capable of attainment and that the various experiences were not hallucinations. He proved that God-vision was fact, not fraud, and was not susceptible of any psychological analysis or interpretation. We cannot set down religion to repression of sex or to any abnormality in man. God-realization is no fake as it transforms the being of the individual concerned and fills him with a sense of consecration, absolute peace and calm.

Some make much of the word "synthesis" which they use glibly confusing it with eclecticism. For instance, if a temple was erected to Ramakrishna in a style which combined the main features of a mosque, a church and a synagogue, one would get the impression that synthesis was the juxtaposition of things normally supposed to be antagonistic to each other. Yet it is really a reconciliation of opposites in the light of a fundamental unity. We are apt to take too lightly Ramakrishna's parables of the tank and the Ganga with different ghats. As he pointed out, the steps in a bathing pool or on the riverside, though different and apart from one another, lead to the same water. He summed up all that he had to say on the synthesis of religions thus: "All the different religions are different paths to God." The ghats, though different, lead to the same Ganga, and the water drawn is the same despite the various names by which it is called and the different receptacles in which it is carried.

It is the same with the various religions. Even if they differ in belief and practice, there is no reason why we should consider them to be opposed to one another. As Darwin put it, "It is ignorance that begets confidence." The ignorant extol their own religion at the expense of the others. Through a variety of spiritual experiences Ramakrishna realized that each religion was true and great in its place. He pointed out that the different creeds, if sincerely followed and practised, would lead to God, although realized under different forms, each of which is indeed a form of God, and one is not better or worse than another.

To say that the different religions are different paths to God is now a truism, and it seems that we are making overmuch of Ramakrishna's message.[1] We must not, however, forget that truth only appears to be a truism after its discovery. We often pride ourselves on our wisdom and do not consider what it is that puts us wise. It is well known how Columbus discovered the New World. One day to his surprise he found some of his friends making light of his achievement. They told him that it was easy enough for every one sailing westward from Europe to discover America. So Columbus asked them to stand an egg on its end. They tried hard, but it seemed impossible. He then gently stroked the egg against the table and made it stand on the slightly flattened end. His friends said that it was easy, but he pointed out that this was only so after he had done it.[2]

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[1] Max Müller: *Ramakrishna*, P. 94, London, 1898.

It is no use crying down Ramakrishna's achievement. Truth is simple enough, but it requires a genius to discover it.[3] We hold that no one before the Master ever cared to live the different religions or to realize their respective ideals. Sri Krișṇa in the *Gītā* does say that the different paths men follow in their spiritual quest lead to God.[4] But the point is that Sri Krișṇa only preached the idea; it was left for Ramakrishna to prove it. We should not then cavil at Ramakrishna who showed the unity of the religions, in the sense that each of them could lead to the realization of God. And this he demonstrated by living the full gamut of spiritual experience.

Indeed religions are one in the goal at which they aim, though they retain their distinctive features as different disciplines. This again Ramakrishna emphasized. As he put it, paddy plants grow out of paddy seeds, never out of rice. All that he meant was that the doctrinal content of a religion by itself leads nowhere. There is an identical core in each of these doctrines but that core by itself is no religion.

Generally speaking, religious teachers are agreed on the fundamentals of religion. Still it will not do to ignore the difference in the methods and techniques of the different religions even when raised from the same seed. Every creed, in short, takes on a veneer of the society in which it grows. Sometimes religious and social institutions are so mingled together that we cannot draw them apart. Christianity, as we know, was based on the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. And the garb in which it appears and functions—

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[2] Washington Irving: *Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, 2nd edition, pp. 118-119, Thomas Tegg, London, 1841.

[3] *Cf*. Kant: *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, ed. by Paul Carus, p. 19, Kegan Paul, London, 1902. Kant says, "Men who never think independently have nevertheless the acuteness to discover everything, after it has been once shown them, in what was said long since, though no one ever saw it there before."

[4] IV, 11.

its symbolism, ceremonials and institutions—is mostly derived from the surrounding circumstances. So also with all other religions. Every one has its distinctive features, and we must reckon with them.

It is, of course, true that every religion has a spiritual height or heights, which are nothing short of mysticism. But we should bear in mind that mysticism is not a kind, but the crown, of religion. Mystics are apart from ordinary men in that they reach a peak or the summit of spiritual experience. At their height the difference between one religion and another does not count. They remain engrossed in truth and bliss which is the end of every religion. In point of fact we only distinguish Christian, Muslim, Hindu and other mystics by some external and superficial marks. Here, however, our concern is rather to see whether the popular religions are antagonistic to each other. Ramakrishna pointed out they are different, and at the same time effected a synthesis of them in the light of the experience that they all led to the same goal, union with God.

Some may still argue that the different religions represent a scale of values. Even though it is admitted that each aims at and leads to God, yet the forms under which God is realized may differ from one another in value and worth. I have already touched on this point in my analysis of the revelation of God to Ramakrishna, but I will repeat it here. Generally speaking, science is opposed to religion and this opposition is concerned with whether God has form or not. Indeed science has force in its opposition to the popular conception of God, particularly in the view of the Absolutists who maintain on speculative grounds that Reality is beyond time, space and all determination.

Both scientists and Absolutists proceed with a misconception about popular religion. They fail to grasp the elaborate symbolism through which religious consciousness works itself out. It is true that we cannot have a Deity corresponding to popular ideas. There is really no God with a gross body like ours and with an abode in some distant part of the visible world. But from this it does not follow that God is a chimera, or is absolutely formless and impersonal. God is the sole reality creating and sustaining the universe and as such in a way transcends Creation. So God cannot be described in terms of anything of this world, but appears to us as the Absolute. Now some may point out that the Absolute, being the sole reality, is the supreme value and that the religion that leads to it is the absolute religion, all others remaining only approximations to it.

How can philosophers or scientists determine what God is like? They have developed their conceptions of the supreme Being, if they have any, on the basis of their knowledge of the empirical world and the fundamental laws of thought. Such ideas may give satisfaction to the persons concerned, but cannot compel conviction in anybody else as they do not derive from any spiritual experience. On more than one occasion Ramakrishna said that it was given to him in revelation that God is both with and without form, and that neither state is more real than the other. Whether God has any form or forms is wholly a matter of spiritual experience. If He has, they are spiritual ones which He assumes to present Himself to His devotees. And some of them, we are told, are eternal. It is no use trying to conceive them as falling into a hierarchy; for God remains identical with Himself in each of them. If any one attains to the realization of a form of God, he realizes Him. This fills his being with ecstasy and puts him in the beatific state. Nevertheless, the Lord may, if He pleases, lead the aspirant to the realization of other forms and even of the formless.

It may, however, be contended that on Ramakrishna's showing the state of the perfect man is highest in the scale of spiritual experiences. True, the *Vijnāni*—the perfect man is he who has realized God with a form and as formless. But the point is that this is a state apart, it represents all possible realization of the Deity. It transcends and also includes the state of realization of God with and without form. Though the state of the *Vijnāni* marks the climax of the human realization of God, yet we cannot draw upon it to determine any relative value of the religions. If God pleases, the follower of any creed may attain to the state of the *Vijnāni*. This is no privilege of any particular cult which the *Vijnāni* transcends and rises to what we prefer to call universal religion. The latter from its very nature is not particular but is the soul of religion disincarnate. That is to say, universal religion is a spiritual experience with a content which different creeds embody or seek to embody through their respective ideals and practices. The state of the *Vijnāni,* therefore, makes for unity rather than any system of comparative values in religion. No creed is better or greater than any other.

Some, however, seek to establish a democracy of religions from a different point of view. They contend that each exists in its own rights and has in it something of value, although each of them is fragmentary. Sri Aurobindo is the most prominent among the exponents of this view. He maintains that every religion is good enough so far as it goes. As he says, Paganism enhanced the sense of beauty in man, heightened his feelings and broadened his outlook on life; Christianity gave him the vision of divine love and quickened his sense of purity; Buddhism showed him the path to wisdom, gentleness and calm; Judaism and Islam taught him how to combine action with devotion to God; Hinduism opened to him "profoundest spiritual possibilities".[5]

Each religion, Aurobindo points out, contributed a good deal to human culture; but no one of them should be considered as by itself complete. It would be a good thing, he says, if they could embrace one another, each imbibing the fundamentals of the rest. He is, however, very sceptical of the possibility of any such relationship between religions. For him dogmas, cults and creeds prevent any possible amalgam of the essentials of the different faiths.

It seems that Aurobindo prefers an eclectic religion to any of the existing ones. An eclectic religion is admittedly one in which the fundamentals of the different cults are combined, but it is artificial and lacks the vitality of a living one. That way, of course, we could get a good religious content, but would inevitably fail to give it a concrete embodiment. Obviously a religion grows and can never be made. For example, in the fourth and the fifth century of the Christian era some Neo-Platonists tried to build up an eclectic religion. They drew upon the then existing cults and developed an international pantheon as well as an international form of worship. But, alas! the new religion, if it was one at all, was more or less confined to intellectuals and had no appeal for the masses. It could not be made popular even by the patronage of Julian, the Roman Emperor. The artificiality of later Neo-Platonism was brought into bold relief by its contact with Christianity, which was then another new religion. Christianity, however, was not made. It took its rise from a spiritual fountain, Jesus Christ.

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[5] *Vide Thoughts and Glimpses*, pp. 37-38, Calcutta, 1932.

All that Aurobindo means when he says that the religions must embrace one another is that each of them could enlarge its content by imbibing what it lacked from the rest. But it could not happen so. Dogmas and cults, he tells us, were the barriers between one creed and another. Here, then, are two points well worth our consideration: first, whether any religion is incomplete in the sense that it is incapable of bringing fulfilment to the spiritual aspiration of man; second, whether dogmas and doctrines by their very nature preclude any commerce between different cults.

To take up the second point first. It is well known that Buddhism spread to countries outside India long before the birth of Jesus. We have reasons to believe that Buddhist ideas moved up to Greece, especially after Alexander's expedition to India. At any rate Buddhist monks were roaming Asia Minor and the adjoining countries, from the fourth century B.C. onwards, and it was partly through them and through Alexandria that the yogic and mystical culture of India gradually found its way into the spiritual centres of the Western world. Buddhism with its cult of *ahiṁsā*—non-violence and its conception of monastic life contributed, in a remote way at least, towards the organization of the early Christian Church. Buddhism in its turn was modified a good deal by the influence of Hinduism and possibly by other religions. In its original form it was a way of meditation or yoga in a restricted sense. Later a new form arose out of a ferment of early Buddhist, Hindu, and other ideas. The conception of Bodhisattva as well as of the Buddha as the Saviour can be traced to the Hindu doctrine of Avatara or Incarnation. The worship of the Buddha in any form was certainly adopted under the influence of Hinduism.[6] Islam and Christianity, again, in the elaboration of their major doctrines and dogmas drew upon the religion of the Old Testament. The Brāhmo cult was, of course, founded upon the inspiration and experience of Ram Mohan Roy. But its congregational form of worship derived for the most part from Christianity, Islam and Hinduism.

It may, however, be contended that Aurobindo is concerned with the present and that he has no need to look back in the past. The point he tries to make is that there is no commerce between the existing religions, particularly the major ones—Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. It is true that there is much in the votaries of each of the religions that makes for bigotry, which blinds us to the truth of creeds other than our own. We cannot, however, say that barriers, if any, between the religions still stand intact.

The technique of modern civilization has brought the different peoples of the world far closer together than before. Contact between them has taken place at different levels. In modern times the first exchange between Eastern and Western culture was effected through the contact between

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[6] A. Coomaraswamy: *Buddha And The Gospel of Buddhism*, pp. 222-258, London, 1956; also W. W. Rockhill: *Life of the Buddha*, pp. 197-202, London, 1884; *Cf.* the article on Bodhisattva in Hastings's *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. II.

Christianity and the Eastern religions. However, the attitude of the Westerners to Eastern religions was originally hostile. They thought that the latter had no worth, and they wanted to replace the Eastern Faiths by their own. But they forgot that Jesus Christ who gave them their religion belonged to the East. Now the boot is on the other leg. As has been indicated before, after long years of study of oriental culture many in the West have come to realize that the religions of the East too have some value and contain a measure of truth. Further the development of science has compelled a review of religious dogmas and a re-interpretation of them. Scientific knowledge, in short, has widened the outlook of the theologians and made them inquisitive about spiritual values. Anthropological researches have stimulated a study like comparative religion. Some of the leaders of the Christian Church itself now think it worth while to incorporate in their Faith whatever valuable elements are found in other religions. They are of opinion that by absorbing the essentials of other religions Christianity would become richer and fuller, even though in their view it is already full and rich enough in its content.

Perhaps one should not make much of this point; for it only represents the view of a few broad-minded Christians. Although political and economic imperialism have had their day, they are still abroad. Many of us are still firmly convinced that ours is the absolute and eternal religion and we dream of making it a world Faith. This is as true of Christians as of Mohammedans, Buddhists and the old-fashioned and orthodox among Hindus. Comparative studies made in the right spirit can go a long way to foster religious fellowship, but alone they cannot altogether eliminate opposition between them. In some cases, on the other hand, a comparative study may end in accentuating the differences between religions. The difficulty is that we cannot secure any universal truth by a merely speculative approach to religions. We can thereby simply interpret them one way or the other.

Ramakrishna's approach to the religions was neither theoretical nor speculative, but a verification through direct spiritual experiments and experiences. He demonstrated by them that the major religions all lead to the same goal, God, and that through each of them one can realize God, provided one is seized with an intense longing for Him. Ramakrishna's demonstration set at rest all speculation as to which religion is better than any other or which is best. His teaching is therefore calculated to instil into every sincere soul the sense of harmony. His influence is spreading on all sides, and as a result of it the barriers artificially erected between religions are beginning to break down.

Now to take up the first point, whether each of the religions mentioned above is incomplete or fragmentary. As I have mentioned above, according to Aurobindo, Paganism increased the light of beauty in man and inspired him towards all-round perfection. If Paganism is identified with Greek or Roman religion or both, and if "all-round perfection" means harmonious development of all the aspects of our being, we may say that Paganism was much less than a religion or marked only a stage in the development of it. The prime object of religion is admittedly God, no matter how vaguely He may be conceived. So a creed, which takes an empirical object or end as being on a par with God, or evaluates anything above Him, is not a religion worth the name. Anyway, the old Greek or Roman cults bore the stamp of the general culture that formed their background. And it is true to say that Paganism in Aurobindo's sense at some stage of its development heightened in its votaries the sense of beauty. We cannot, however, say that beauty as such and a sense of it had no bearing upon any other religion. It is common knowledge that the sense of beauty is one of the planks upon which Vaiṣṇavism, particularly the Bengal school thereof, stands.[7] Even in the Upaniṣads the supreme Being is often conceived and described in terms of Beauty and Delight. Therein in more than one context the Supreme is conceived as Delight,[8] out of which proceeds the world with things and beings. Thus it can be shown that the sense of beauty had some rôle to play in every religion that was concerned with Love of God.

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[7] Sri Rupa Goswami: *Ujjvala Nīlamanih*, ed. by Puridas, Dacca, 1946; Sacinandan Vidyanidhi: *Ujjvala Chandrikā*, ed. by Kuladaprasad Mallik and Shivratan Mitra, Santiniketan, 1333 B.S.

On the other hand, Aurobindo maintains that Christianity gave man some vision of divine love and charity. Marcion in the second century A.D. spoke in the same strain. He sought to establish that Christianity was superior to Paganism. He analyzed pagan religions in his own way and pointed out that pagans only conceived and could conceive God as the omnipotent cause, or, at most, as the Lord of the universe. According to him, Christianity surpassed them all by its conception of God as Love; for it was founded upon the revelation of the Deity as Love in Jesus Christ. But we cannot agree that this is a monopoly of Christians. Marcion was a Venetian merchant who became a Christian convert. We understand his overzeal for his new Faith, but we cannot understand how a savant like Aurobindo could say that the conception of God as Love was entirely Christian. In Buddhism the cult of *ahiṁsā* does not mean anything negative. It means love of humanity. Christ's precept "Love thy neighbour as thyself" is an equivalent of what is conveyed by the word *"ahiṁsā"*. Love of men, love even towards the lower animals, is stressed in Buddhism and Jainism. The Buddha attained to Light or which is the same thing, to Truth. Light divine that illumined his mind and later through him the world revealed itself in his heart as Love. So with the Buddha divine Light was Love. Further Sri Chaitanya of Bengal was a living embodiment of Love divine. By his life and teaching he indicated how to spiritualize deepest human love and realize divine Love.

Again, charity, fellow-feeling and the service of men are no peculiar or exclusive features of any particular religion. Lovers of God cannot but love His creation. In every religion therefore the service of men is a necessary adjunct to that of God. It is one of the cardinal principles of Hinduism that Truth is that which does good to humanity. In the *Bhagavadgītā,* for instance, Sri Krişņa exhorts Arjuna to do his work in such a way as to do good to mankind and to attain his own salvation. Sri Krişņa asks him to work even though he has already achieved salvation.[9] Overzeal for service explains the urge in Buddhism for the wholesale salvation of the human race. It was this that drove some Buddhists to formulate a god, so to speak, who would suffer for the sake of the world. The Vaişņavas again in their way conceived love of men as ancillary to love of God.

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[8] *Taittirīya,* III, vi; II, vii.

According to Aurobindo, again, a combination of action and devotion is an exclusive characteristic of Judaism and Islam. We, however, find that in every developed religion action and devotion link up. In the Upanişads, for instance, the emphasis is laid upon both action and devotion. As it is put in the *Iśa Upanişad*: "We must seek knowledge and Truth, but we should not, in fact, cannot, shun life".[10] Whatever be the conditions or circumstances in which we find ourselves, we can never be absolutely passive. We have to act and work at least for the sustenance of life. So we have to turn action to the attainment of Truth. And this we can only do if we work in a detached way with devotion to God. In the *Bhagavadgītā* a religion of action, involving the rudiments of knowledge and love is propounded for the generality of men.

Aurobindo, on the other hand, credits Hinduism with the profoundest possibilities. But the point we should take note of is that religion, and, for that reason, every religion has just one possibility, union with the supreme Being. And religion as such proceeds with the postulate that this possibility can be actualized. Every creed therefore holds promise of fulfilment of this possibility. The possibilities that

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[9] *Gītā,* III, 20.
[10] *Iśa,* 2.

Aurobindo discerns in Hinduism are all vague, or relate to the fuller development of art, literature, philosophy and moral life. But this is nothing peculiar to Hinduism. Historically every religion has exerted its influence upon culture in its own sphere and also outside of it.

Why then does Aurobindo take such a distorted view of religions in relation to one another? If we read between the lines, we find that he analyzes religions and speaks of their respective contributions to human culture not primarily to show that each of them has its value and use, but to put them in the wrong before he discards them. This motive is clear when he says, "All religions have saved a number of souls, but none yet has been able to spiritualise mankind."[11] For this, he points out, we do not require cult or creed, but purely spiritual evolution.

It is claimed that Aurobindo's mission is to spiritualize the material, to immortalize the mortal and to divinize the human. Whether wholesale spiritualization of the human race is possible or not is still an open question. Aurobindo himself says that though the entire human race cannot be at once spiritualized, through the spiritualization of a few individuals a new species of beings, whom he calls Supermen, would emerge, who would be to men what men are now to apes. It is obvious that he attaches a new meaning to the term "spiritualization". He tells us that Supermen would be spirits in the strict sense; in them all imperfection, including bodily defect and deformity, would be eliminated and their bodies, unlike ours, would be the perfect moulds of spirit, which death would not touch. I cannot discuss this here, important and interesting as it is, for it would take me too far afield. To say the least, I regard Aurobindo's scheme of spiritualization as Utopian.[12]

The point at issue is whether religions have a common goal to reach and whether they lead or can lead to the common goal, union with God. This is a problem which, as we have seen, no intellectual study can solve. We can only hope to settle it by spiritual experiment. But this presupposes a spiritual capacity which we lack. Fortunately, however, Ramakrishna undertook this in the interests of humanity. He showed by his life and experiences that every religion is great in its place and can lead one to the realization of God, provided one is God-intoxicated. Those who posit a value higher than God only seek to discredit religions the avowed object of which is God. But this cannot deter us from religious life. If we believe in Him and continue to regard union with Him as the ultimate end of human life, religions stand on firm ground. To be sure, our belief has been greatly strengthened by Ramakrishna's spiritual experiences and teaching.

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[11] *Thoughts and Glimpses*, p. 38.
[12] *Vide* my *Sri Aurobindo and the Future of Mankind*, Calcutta, 1934.

It may seem that I am making much of Ramakrishna's teaching. We may be told that his saying "Truth is one" is as old as the hills. Certainly, the Vedic sages sang of the One in the words "Truth is one; sages call it by various names."[13]

It is perhaps fairly correct to say that to the Vedic sages there was no problem regarding any possible reconciliation of some contending religions or cults. In all probability with the sages nomenclature was a source of trouble. It is understandable that the expression of the high spiritual experience by a sage with the help of some symbols, similes and metaphors must have borne the impress of his distinctive personality. So all that the Vedic seers emphasized in the texts in question was the unity of the spiritual experience they had and also of its content as against the difference in the modes and mediums of its expression.

The world was far more extended and the world situation far more complex in the time of Ramakrishna than in that of the Vedic sages. Nowadays a number of organized religions and corresponding cultures came to clash with one another. Besides, there was bitter wrangling over cults and creeds even in the same fold. Ramakrishna followed out in details the major religious disciplines and achieved their fulfilment in his own experience. If we ponder his life and teaching dispassionately, we find that he came not to pour old wine into new bottles, but to show that the old bottles were still strong enough to hold the old vintage, though they needed a cleaning-up. Ramakrishna gave guidance to benighted mankind by his overall experience that all religions led to God. He gave the much-needed synthesis, no eclecticism. He did not mean that we would have to follow all religions at the same time or to make a new religion out of the existing ones. He rather enjoined us to follow our individual creeds with unflinching faith and devotion armed with the conviction that people practising their different religions are only travelling by different paths to the same goal. This conception and the consequent outlook on life would assuredly inspire tolerance, harmony and will for peace in the peoples of the world who are at present being consumed with ideological animosity, hatred and fear.

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[13] *Rig-Veda*, X, 114; I, 164.

CHAPTER VIII

EPILOGUE

PERSONALITY AND GOD

According to Advaita Vedānta, God is only an appearance, while Reality is essentially impersonal.[1] It is therefore worth while to consider in some detail the conception of God as the divine Person.

Vedic scholars say that a clear theistic view was developed during the Vedic period, especially when Varuṇa was conceived as the Lord of the universe and the Custodian of the Law of righteousness called *Rita*. It is true that Varuṇa was only one of the Nature Gods, such as Indra, Mitra, Parjanya, and others[2] whom the Vedic people used to worship. But they came gradually to feel an urge for an infinite Being as the Creator and Sustainer of the world. The conception of Varuṇa as the supreme Being regulating the course of the universe and furnishing the motive force behind man's moral life was really a step towards religion in the strict sense. This conception was, of course, later clarified in two distinct stages in so far as the Rig-Veda was concerned. The idea of God as infinite and ineffable and the Lord of the universe is developed in the Vedic hymn of Creation and also in the hymns of Hịraṇyagarva and Puruṣa.[3]

In the hymn of Creation, the beginning of the world was shrouded in a mystery and was beyond mind, thought and all human conception. In the beginning there was neither being nor non-being, no earth, no sky, no ether; there was neither birth nor death; there was the One enveloped by complete darkness which was like a boundless expanse of water—the One who manifested Himself as things and beings of the world through energizing within Himself. In the hymn an attempt is made to indicate how Creation proceeded from the supreme Being, but scepticism intervenes. And the question is raised whether it is possible to penetrate the mystery of Creation. It is now affirmed that Creation being an ultimate fact is incomprehensible and that if anybody knows all about it, that is the Lord of the universe.[4]

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[1] See my articles: *Brahman And Māyā in Advaita Metaphysics* and *Liberation in Bodily Existence* in *Philosophy East and West,* July, 1952; July, 1954.

[2] Swami Prabhavananda: *Vedic Religion and Philosophy,* p. 30, Madras, 1937.

[3] A. B. Keith: *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads,* Vol. II, p. 439, Harvard, 1925; also R. C. Datta: *Rig-Veda,* Vols I & II, Calcutta, 1886.

Creation is indeed the crux of all philosophy. Philosophers, as we know, have been grappling with it through the ages. But we cannot say that they have yet been able to solve the problem. It still faces us with baffling freshness. At all events, the Vedic conception of Creation is deep enough and withal incomplete, deep because the conception reaches beyond the empirical, incomplete in the sense that the idea remains inarticulate and ends in a sort of agnosticism. Therein, however, one point is clearly set out. It is that one supreme Being is the Creator and Lord of the universe, and by implication the supreme Person.

We find a rather positive conception of the Supreme in the *Hiraṇyagarva* and *Puruṣa Sūkta*. Hiraṇyagarva, the luminous Self, is conceived as the Creator and Lord of the universe. So also is Puruṣa. Puruṣa, the divine Person, is described as thousand-headed, thousand-eyed, thousand-handed and as pervading the whole world. In other words, He is infinite and manifests Himself in the finite things and beings. But Puruṣa is not exhausted in Creation. It is pointed out that only a quarter, a part of His being, is expended in Creation and that the major portion remains intact in Heaven.

All this brings out the fact that the supreme Being is both immanent and transcendent. Nothing in fact falls outside Him who is not far away but is present in the finite, though the full wealth of His being is not expended in creating the world. Thus we find that in the Rig-Veda itself the conception of one supreme Being at the back of the universe is developed by stages. The supreme Being is, in short, conceived as the world-maker and the source of all laws. As self-consciousness, purpose, even desire for creation, are ascribed to the supreme Being, He must be a Person. He is called Puruṣa, which means a person. Thus we see that the Rig-Veda ends with the conception of the World-Creator as the divine Person. Much the same idea dominates the *Brāhmaṇas* that are mainly concerned with sacrifices and sacrificial rites, although the supreme Being is called now Prajāpati, now Viṣṇu, and is sometimes otherwise conceived. We shall see later that it is this conception of the supreme Being which is the cornerstone of India's spiritual culture.

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[4] Sampurnanand: *Cosmogony in Indian Thought*, 2nd ed. p. 80, (*vide* the translation of the *Nāsadīya Sūkta*, 7), Lucknow, 1949.

Now we have to consider whether the Upaniṣads discard the conception of the Supreme as the Divine Person. According to some, the Upaniṣads teach about *Brahman* which is absolutely indeterminate and impersonal. As is well known, commentators on the *Brahma-Sūtra* wrangle over the issue whether *Brahman* is the divine Person. Those who accept the position that *Brahman* is indeterminate and impersonal seek to explain away whatever conception of the Divine as a Person is found in the Upaniṣads. They maintain that the idea of *Brahman* as the divine Person is only a feature of the later Upaniṣads, particularly of the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*. This Upaniṣad, they contend, was written under the influence of the Vaiṣṇava cult which represented an independent spiritual movement.[5]

In any case, the central conception in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* is God the divine Person, not the Absolute indeterminate and impersonal. Thus this Upaniṣad says that the Lord supports the universe involving the perishable and the imperishable, the manifested and the unmanifested.[6] Again, in it the Lord is differently described, being called Hara, Deva, Maheswara, and so forth, and all these words mean God.[7] We are told that the world-appearance ceases for one who has attained union with God. In the third chapter the idea of God is further elaborated. Therein the prayer is made that the auspicious aspect of the manifested world which proceeds from the Lord be not destroyed. It is then said that God is infinite and in a way transcends the world with its aspects and that nothing of this world can reach the transcendent realm. There neither the sun nor the moon shines, not to speak of fire.[8] The supreme Person effulgent like the sun resides beyond darkness—the world of appearance.[9] The Lord none the less pervades the whole universe and remains the innermost principle of every thing and every being. It is averred that those who realize God as such become immortal.[10] And so on.

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[5] *Vide* Swami Thyagisananda: *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*: Introduction, Madras, 1937.

But how conceive the divine Person? Has He a body, hands and feet, and does He think, feel and will? A human being is considered a person precisely in this sense. Should we then say that God is a magnified man? No. God is not to be so conceived. The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* says that though God, the divine Person, has no body, neither hands nor feet, He moves fast, faster than anything and can grasp all things, gross and subtle. He sees, though He has no eyes. He hears, though He has no ears. He knows everything. Such is God, who creates and sustains the world and ordains everything according to laws.

Now let us consider some other Upaniṣads. The *Iśa* is one of the oldest and opens with the conception of *Brahman* as the Lord of the universe. Though in this case the approach to *Brahman* is somewhat different from that of the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, yet the central conception of Reality is much the same. God as the divine Person is the main category and the emphasis is laid upon the immanence of God in the world. The Lord does not reside far away in Heaven but pervades the universe.[11] But what is the Lord like? "He is bright, bodiless, without imperfection and sinews, pure and unpierced by evil. He is seer, thinker, self-existent and the One who ordered things from years sempiternal."[12] Obviously *Brahman* as described in the *Īśa Upaniṣad* is not indeterminate, but is the divine Person.

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[6] *Op. cit.*, I, 8.
[7] *Op. cit.*, I, 10.
[8] *Op. cit.*, VI, 14.
[9] *Op. cit.*, III, 8.
[10] *Op. cit.*, III, 6-7.

In the *Kena Upaniṣad,* of course, no description of the nature of *Brahman* is attempted. But an attempt is made to show *Brahman* as the ultimate source and cause of everything in the world. Life, mind, and the inner organs of the body function because of *Brahman.* For instance, wind blows and fire burns, not because of any force intrinsic in them, but because of *Brahman* who fills the universe. So whatever happens in the physical and vital world and what men and gods achieve in their respective spheres are ultimately to be traced to God. Evidently the *Kena Upaniṣad* goes a long way to supplement the conception of *Brahman* as the supreme Ordainer found in the *Īśa Upaniṣad.*

In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* an approach to Reality is made primarily through an analysis of the individual self, Reality or the supreme Being being called Self. Still *Brahman* as indeterminate and impersonal is not the theme of this Upaniṣad. In one context *Brahman* is described as the self-existent who has created along with so many other things the senses which are confined to gross physical objects.[13] Elsewhere the supreme Being conceived as Self is called the Lord of things and beings past, present and future.[14] He is characterized as the One self-poised and immanent in everything. As such He brings into existence the multitudinous things and beings of the world.[15] Then the whole universe is conceived as a vast tree with roots spreading upwards and with branches hanging downwards. The branches are the phenomena and the roots represent the primal cause of the world. The idea is that the world is one whole and cannot be separated from its cause. The cause and its effects together constitute the whole, and the cause is *Brahman* who is self-caused and self-luminous and in whom all worlds gross and subtle exist.[16] It is now clear that the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* is in line with the Upaniṣads which conceive *Brahman* as determinate in the sense that *Brahman* is the Creator and Ordainer of the world.

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[11] *Īśa,* 1, 8.

[12] *Op. cit.,* 8; *vide* Sri Aurobindo: *Isha Upanishad,* pp. 6-7, Calcutta, 1924.

[13] *Kaṭha,* II, i, 1.

[14] *Op. cit.,* II, i, 5, 12, 13.

However, there are some Upaniṣadic texts in which *Brahman* is described as both impersonal and indeterminate. In the *Taittirīya,* for instance, *Brahman* is mentioned as Truth, Knowledge and the Infinite.[17] There is, however, no difficulty in regard to the terms "Truth" and "Infinite". *Brahman* being ultimate reality is the truth of things, so that the term as applied just means that *Brahman* is absolutely real. The term "Infinite" means that *Brahman* far from being identified with any aspect of the empirical world transcends and includes it. The word "Knowledge" in this connexion nevertheless gives us pause. A knower knows and the known is an object of knowledge. Now, if *Brahman* is described as Knowledge, *Brahman* is, indeed, impersonal, though not indeterminate, and similar positive terms are used in other Upaniṣads. For instance, in the *Chhāndogya Upaniṣad Brahman* is characterized as supreme Light.[18] There are, indeed, different kinds of light in the visible world caused by the sun, moon and lightning. These, however, by themselves are nothing. They shine only by the light of *Brahman*.

It is not quite true to say that the Upaniṣadic *Brahman*, though impersonal, is determinate as the contrary is stated in some texts. A good example occurs in the *Brihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* where the twofold nature of *Brahman* is described.[19] Here it is said that *Brahman* has two forms, visible and invisible, mortal and immortal, limited and unlimited, determinate and indeterminate. The gross or visible form is earth, water, fire and their modes. The subtle form, on the other hand, is found in air and ether. As the latter are invisible, they are considered to differ from earth, water and fire, although all five come together as elements of the perishable world. *Brahman,* on the other hand, is imperishable and eternal. Everything in the world is limited in the double sense that it does not exist in its own rights and is confronted by its counterpart outside it. But *Brahman* being ultimate reality is self-dependent and all-inclusive, is, in short, unlimited. Again, whatever we may fix upon in our experience has a determinate content. It exists and has its own nature which is a complex of qualities and relations. But *Brahman* in its essence is unlike anything of this world, in the sense of being wholly indeterminate. So the best way to describe *Brahman* is by negative terms. We can say nothing positive about *Brahman ;* we can suggest it only by negating positive finite things, qualities and relations, saying "Not this, not this."[20] That is all. Now, the world with its multitudinous things and beings has come out of *Brahman.*[21] So the world, which is a product of *Brahman,* is taken to represent a form of *Brahman,* which is changeful, perishable, limited and determinate. The other form of *Brahman* remains behind and is transcendent, imperishable, impersonal and indeterminate.

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[15] II, ii, 12.
[16] II, iii, 1.
[17] *Taittirīya, Brahmānanda Valli,* II, i.
[18] III, vii, 7.

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It is well known that commentators on the Upaniṣadic texts differ widely among themselves. Some quote chapter and verse to show that *Brahman* is determinate and personal, while others quote extensively from some Upaniṣads to prove that *Brahman* is indeterminate and impersonal.

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[19] II, iii, 1.
[20] *Brihadāraṇyaka,* III, iii, 6.
[21] II, iv, 10.

Both groups are, in my opinion, wrong. They distort the teaching of the Upaniṣads taken as a whole. As has been indicated above, there are innumerable texts that refer to *Brahman* as the divine Person, while others posit an indeterminate and impersonal *Brahman*. But we cannot accept one set and reject the rest, we have to accept them all if we regard the Upaniṣads as authoritative. When we do so we cannot deny that they embody two distinct conceptions of *Brahman* which seem to contradict each other. I do not know whether the author of the *Brahma-Sūtra* perceived this more than the commentators. However, the whole point was mooted in an aphorism[22] which later became the subject of a keen controversy among Vedāntic scholars. But here there is no need to go into it all. Anyway, there is an advance upon the Upaniṣads in the *Bhagavadgītā*, where a higher category evolves synthesizing the conceptions of *Brahman* as indeterminate and as determinate and the divine Person.

In one place in the *Bhagavadgītā* it is said that in this world we can distinguish between two kinds of being, perishable and imperishable.[23] Everything finite is in time and subject to change, it comes into existence, grows and then withers away. But change itself posits the changeless. There is, indeed, a clear difference between these two kinds of being, the one being the negation of the other. Now, if the things and beings of this world are ever changing, the changeless transcends the world. And the changeless which is imperishable is obviously *Brahman*, indeterminate and impersonal as mentioned in some Upaniṣads. As we see, these two kinds of being from their very nature fall apart from each other, and if *Brahman* is absolutely indeterminate and impersonal, we cannot trace the world to it. But, if it is ultimate reality, it must be connected with the world. *Brahman* is *ex hypothesi* ultimate reality. So it is from *Brahman* that the world proceeds. But *Brahman*, being absolute, impersonal and all-perfect, cannot possibly create anything out of itself or out of nothing. This is the main difficulty here. In short, the two categories—the changeful and the changeless are manifestly opposite to each other. The *Bhagavadgītā,* however, tries to get over this difficulty by the category *Puruṣottama,* the highest Being. We are told that above the two categories mentioned before there is a Being which is the highest, to be called God. The word "God" in the *Bhagavadgītā* nevertheless means not an extra-cosmic, but the supreme, Being who, though in His essence immutable and imperishable, creates and pervades the gross and subtle world.[24]

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[22] *Brahma-Sūtra,* III, ii, 11.
[23] *Gītā,* XV, 16.

Now the question is whether there is any real difference between the conception of *Brahman* as indeterminate and impersonal and that of God as creating and sustaining the worlds. That there is such a difference is laid down in the *Gītā.* God the Creator and Sustainer of the worlds is, we are told, far superior to indeterminate and impersonal *Brahman.* As the divine Person He creates and ordains everything in the universe and thus transcends the Indeterminate and Impersonal which as such is not capable of creation. God, though infinite and eternal, manifests Himself in the things and beings of the world. He is evidently the highest category which includes those of the changeful and the changeless with the opposition between them removed. This shows that these two categories represent only two moments in the plenitude of God's being.

Some may urge that the term *"Puruṣottama"* and the phrase *"uttama Puruṣa"* meaning the highest Being are already found in the *Chhāndogya Upaniṣad,* where it is said: "He is the highest being or Puruṣa."[25] On the face of it this means that the individual self in its spiritual evolution eventually rises out of the state of identification with the gross body and realizes its true nature, and one who does this is indeed perfect; for there is nothing higher for one in such a state to attain. Śankara, however, puts a far-fetched interpretation upon the text. He takes the phrase "the highest being" to mean *Brahman* which in its ultimate nature is, according to him, indeterminate and impersonal. Indeed Śankara is at perfect liberty to do so, and one need not quarrel with him. He is nevertheless in difficulty when commenting on the text of the *Bhagavadgītā* where a conception of the highest Being is expounded. Obviously his attempt to make this fit into his system fails.

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[24] *Gītā,* XV, 17.

[25] *Chhāndogya,* VIII, xii, 3.

Śankara maintains that the term "imperishable" (*Akṣara* or *Kūṭastha*) in the text refers to the inscrutable power of the Lord. But in so doing he distorts the meaning of the word "imperishable" and of the phrase "the highest Being". As he himself admits, what is imperishable or changeless is the opposite of what is changeful.[26] Now, then, the changeless, being the negation of the changeful, falls beyond the latter. The anvil is taken as the proper symbol for the changeless, because metals are hammered into shape on it. But despite all that is wrought on it the anvil remains the same in its nature and function.

Here we cannot rely on the conception of the power of *Brahman* or the Lord, which is relevant only in the context of creation. The world is created, we may say, through the power of *Brahman* or the Lord. But this power being instrumental in creation cannot be opposed to fleeting things and beings. In the text under consideration the word "imperishable" is deliberately contrasted with the word "perishable". The former, being the opposite of the latter, is in itself immutable and indeterminate. Śankara, therefore, confounds us. But the meaning of the texts in question is clear even at first view. At all events, the idea of God as *Puruṣottama* or the highest Person synthesizes the conceptions of the static and the dynamic, the changeless and the changing, the personal and the impersonal. God is impersonal in the sense that He transcends everything, and personal, because He creates and sustains the world and ordains everything.

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[26] *Vide* Śankara's Commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*, chap. XV, 16-18.

This conception of God is, indeed, a great synthesis. But this is not effected merely on a Upaniṣadic basis. It is clearly an advance upon the Upaniṣads, signifying a deeper realization of Reality. We are told that Sri Kriṣṇa's teaching marks the climax of a religious movement which started long before his time. Whether he came as the culmination of an independent religious movement is an open question. History, however, proves that long before his advent a theistic movement, non-Vedic and perhaps non-Aryan in origin, was on foot and influenced some of the later Upaniṣads. That was what is now known as Bhāgavata religion, the first mention of which is found in the Mahābhārata.[27] Obviously this movement originated before the time of the Mahābhārata. Researches in regard to Mohenjo-daro and Harappa show that this theistic movement was parallel to the spiritual development which the Upaniṣads represent. We, however, cannot say definitely whether Sri Kriṣṇa for his synthesis drew upon the former movement, which, even if not inspired by him, was influenced a good deal by his teaching. This is evidenced by the fact that Sri Kriṣṇa's family name and the names of his brother, son and grandson form part of the terminology of the school.

There is indeed evidence that later Bhāgavata religion centred round Sri Kriṣṇa. According to Megasthenes (320 B.C.), Greek ambassador to the Court of the Maurya King Chandragupta at Magadha, a people called Saurseni (Saurasenoi) worshipped their God under the name "Herakles", whom some historians identify with Sri Kriṣṇa.[28] Bhāgavata religion was by that time widespread in India as shown by the fact that Heliodorus (200 B.C.), who was a Greek ambassador to Bhāgavadra, King of Vidiśā, adopted the new Faith.[29] The history of this theistic movement is of absorbing interest, but is not our concern here. Our main purpose is to consider the conception of God formulated and elaborated by this school.

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[27] *Vide* Manilal C. Parekh: *Sri Vallabhācharya*, pp. 197-198, Rajkot, 1943; also Mahābhārata, *Śantiparba*, chap. 339.

[28] J. W. McCrindle: *Ancient India As Described by Megasthenes And Arrian*, p. 97, Calcutta, 1926; J. N. Banerjea: *Development of Hindu Iconography*, pp. 85-86, Calcutta, 1941.

[29] *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*, No. I, p. 16, Calcutta, 1919; Banerjea: P. 102; Parekh: p. 197.

The central conception is that of Nārāyaṇa, the supreme Being, who is the refuge of human beings and lives in the highest Heaven with His devotees immersed in infinite bliss. These beings have neither physical bodies nor sensuous desires. They are bright and shining with spiritual bodies of their own. The whole doctrine is expounded in considerable detail in the specific form of the Bhāgavata (theistic) religion, known as Pāñcarātra.

According to Pāñcarātra, God, the supreme Being, is the key category of religion. Though the Creator and Ordainer of the gross and subtle worlds, He has a transcendent aspect,[30] which is in the background so that we know nothing about it. We can only know God as He is in His spiritual forms and as He manifests Himself in the universe. According to Pāñcarātra, God is the divine Person and has divine attributes, such as omniscience, activity based on independence, inscrutable power or omnipotence, strength or the absence of fatigue, virility or changelessness and splendour.[31] These attributes together constitute the spiritual body of the supreme Being who is also called Vāsudeva. He is the highest personal God and resides in Heaven, which is eternal, in His highest form. He indeed manifests Himself in forms, five in number: the subtle, *Vyūha*, *Vibhava*, *Archā*, and *Antarjāmi*. The subtle form is eternal and the highest form of God as He is in Himself in Heaven. *Vyūha* means the first spiritual manifestation of God and this comprises three stages. From Vāsudeva the highest proceeds the form called *Saṁkarṣaṇa* from which emerges *Pradyumna*, and thence a third form named *Aniruddha*. These three emanations are included in the spiritual world and do not extend beyond it. *Vibhava* is a manifestation of God in earthly form and primarily means a divine Incarnation. Sometimes out of grace God descends to earthly life through human birth in order to fulfil the yearnings of His devotees. Again, He appears in an invisible form (*Archā*) wherever He is worshipped. Further, as He is infinite, He in a way pervades the whole universe (*Antarjāmi*) and remains as the innermost self of every being.[32]

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[30] F. Otto Schräder: *Introduction to the Pāñcarātra And Ahirbudhnya Samhitā*, p. 31, Adyar, 1916.

[31] *Op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

Although in the Pāñcarātra doctrine mention is made of the transcendent, or rather the indeterminate and impersonal aspect of the Deity, the emphasis is laid upon God as the divine Person and His different forms. This shows that Pāñcarātras realized God as the divine Person in diverse forms, gross and subtle. And the emphasis upon the personal aspect of the Supreme had its effect upon later Vaiṣṇavism.

The personal aspect of God is much stressed in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* where the question is raised and discussed: What is the ultimate source of the universe? It is pointed out that Vāsudeva, the supreme Being, is the Creator and that nothing in the world can exist apart from Him.[33] Vāsudeva and God are two names of the same supreme Being. But what is God like? What exactly is His nature and how does He create the world? In some places in the *Bhāgavata* God is described as the supreme Person beyond whom nothing higher exists.[34] He is the highest Being determinate and indeterminate at once.[35] He is indeterminate in the sense that His nature cannot be conceived in terms of anything in the universe. He transcends it all. But it does not mean that He is a vast blank or that He has no character of His own. God is in fact determinate in His nature, in the sense that He is the divine Person. He has His non-empirical divine attributes which together form His spiritual body.[36] But His having a spiritual body does not indicate that He is in time. He in His subtle highest spiritual form resides in Heaven where time cannot reach. That is His eternal form. Neither is God limited or confined to a corner of the universe. He is infinite and the Lord of the universe. Heaven only indicates the highest order of being or existence.

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[32] *Op. cit.*, p. 35.
[33] II, vi, 15; I, i, 1.
[34] II, v, 14.
[35] I, x, 19; ii, 23.
[36] I, ii, 23.

Now, if God is in Heaven in His highest form, how, then, does He create the world? This question is answered thus: God in His subtle form is in Himself beyond time, space and causality. Yet He creates the spatio-temporal order; visible and invisible. And the creation proceeds out of Him as if by way of spontaneous play on His part. If God creates, He does so through *māyā,* His inscrutable power. God in fact wields two kinds of power, spiritual and material.[37] The former is identical with His nature, and the latter is the power of creating and maintaining the gross world. There is, however, no division in God's nature. The two powers are to be traced to His nature and are one. They are conceived rather by way of a functional division between them.

Through His power, then, without an iota of change in His being He assumes the fundamental empirical attributes, namely sattva, raja and tama—the luminous force of harmony or unity, the force that makes for activity, and the force that by retarding the former two leads to inertia, inactivity, destruction and death. God through these forces takes three distinct spiritual forms that are comparatively gross. They are Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. Brahmā creates and Viṣṇu sustains the world, while Śiva carries out the work of destruction. This is the threefold scheme of the world process. There is, of course, no difficulty about this conception of Creation. But it is not to be confused with any human creation. Whenever we human beings create anything, we do so in time. Divine creation is, however, spontaneous; it flows forth out of the divine nature and is not in time which is part of Creation. God by His infinite power brings out of Himself without the least effort the things and beings of the universe somewhat like the spider which spins out of itself a cobweb.[38]

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[37] S. N. Dasgupta: *History of Indian Philosophy,* Vol. IV, p. 13, Cambridge, 1949.

This is the Bhāgavata conception of the Deity, in which, as we have seen, the personality of God is stressed. In one context in the *Bhāgavata,* however, God is described as at once *Brahman,* Self and the Lord of the universe.[39] But this does not square with the conception developed in the *Bhāgavata* considered as a whole. No wonder, then, that some commentators seek to make the text consistent with the central conception of God found in the *Bhāgavata.* Thus in one Commentary the word "*Brahman*" is taken to mean that which is uncreated and consequently no part of the empirical world.[40] The word "*Paramātmā*" is there explained as meaning the supreme Self who is infinitely superior to finite souls, while the term "*Bhagavān*" is taken to signify the Lord of the universe. There is, however, nothing distinctive about this interpretation; the text does no more than state the conception of God elaborated in the body of the *Bhāgavata.*

Some, however, contend that, according to the *Bhāgavata,* God in His essential nature is pure consciousness without form and determination. Pure consciousness, they point out, appears as God, as the Creator and Lord when by its power it brings the world into existence.[41] Now, if God in His ultimate nature is pure consciousness, the personality of God is an appearance and comes about only through the force of consciousness. But this view is contradicted by the passages in the *Bhāgavata* in which God is clearly described as the supreme Being. This treatise begins with a prayer to God wherein He is conceived as supreme Truth meaning that He is the ground and cause of things and beings. He is also thought of as the One self-existent and omniscient who revealed the Veda to

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[38] *Bhāgavata,* II, v, 5.

[39] *Op. cit.,* I, ii, 11.

[40] *Vide* the Commentary on I, ii, 3, ed. by Swami Dhananjaya Das, Calcutta, 1344 B.S.

[41] Dasgupta: *History of Indian Philosophy,* Vol. IV, pp. 13-14.

Brahmā. Obviously, then, God in the *Bhāgavata* is posited as the divine Person.

In the twenty-third passage of the second chapter of the first section of the *Bhāgavata* one supreme Person is conceived as the support of the world. He is possessed of a body of pure spiritual stuff and assumes three distinct forms for the purposes of creation, preservation and destruction. Again in the twenty-third passage of the seventh chapter of the first section Sri Krișņa is addressed as God, the supreme Person, who is the cause of all causes and beyond the worlds, material and spiritual. It is said there that God is not God because of anything beyond Him, but remains in Himself, in His absolute self-existence, through His power of consciousness transcending the power of *māyā* whereby He creates the worlds. Furthermore the thirty-fourth passage of the third chapter of the seventh section refers to God in articulate terms. What is God like? He is infinite and pervades the universe in an invisible form. He has two fundamental powers—those of spirituality and materiality. And so on.

There are indeed some passages that cause confusion. There are at least two such passages one of which has already been discussed, namely where three words—*"Brahman"*, *"Paramātmā"* and *"Bhagavān"* are employed in reference to the supreme Being. At the cost of repetition it must be pointed out that in this instance these three words are synonymous with one another. And as such they do not affect the nature of the Supreme as the divine Person emphasized throughout the *Bhāgavata*. Thus the term *"Brahman"* means ultimate reality, *"Paramātmā"* the highest Self and *"Bhagavān"* the Lord. As God is infinite, the divine Person and the source of the universe, He can well be conceived as at once ultimate reality, the highest Self, and the Lord of the universe. All this is corroborated by what is said lower down in the passage under consideration.[42] Therein the emphasis is put upon devotion. Mention is made of the pious men who in their quest for Truth renounced mundane life and cultivated knowledge which led to devotion, the sole means of attaining union with God.

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[42] *Bhāgavata,* I, ii, 12.

The other passage,[43] however, is embarrassing to us and is apt to give the impression that God is formless, indeterminate and impersonal. It seeks to explain the fact of divine Incarnation which appears rather mystical to many. It is said that the Divine who is essentially spirit (*cidātmā*) assumes a visible earthly form through the power of *māyā* manifesting in *Mahat*—the empirical universal stuff, and so on. In the passage itself there is, of course, a word which in its ordinary acceptation means formless. But this contradicts the conception of God set forth in the opening passage of the *Bhāgavata* and also in many other places where God is conceived as possessing a spiritual body and some pure attributes. So the word "formless" has to be interpreted in the light of the *Bhāgavata* taken as a whole. Even fixing upon the passage in question we can so interpret it as to make it consistent with itself.

In our interpretation of the passage we have to take into consideration the context in which it occurs, namely: How could God in His Incarnation assume an earthly form? It is pointed out that this birth is a mystery. If, however, any explanation is possible, we have simply to say that God who in His nature is without any gross material form assumes human and other forms through His inscrutable power. So the word "formless" as employed in the passage is to be understood as a contrast to the phrase "with forms". Therein the word "form" means the gross form an Incarnation assumes, not form in general. Thus we see that in the *Bhāgavata* God is posited as the divine Person, not as formless impersonal pure consciousness. The fact, however, remains that some of the passages referred to above suggest that God has an indeterminate aspect of His being, although He is essentially the divine Person. We do not know what the author had in mind when he said all this. But clearly he made no attempt to effect a synthesis of the conceptions of Reality as indeterminate and as determinate and personal.

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[43] *Op. cit.*, I, iii, 30.

The conception of the Supreme as the divine Person is, however, not confined to *Bhāgavata* theology, being worked out in greater detail by Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Madhva and others.

According to Advaita Vedānta, *Brahman*, the ultimate reality, is wholly indeterminate and impersonal, so that no creation can be ascribed to it. Consequently it is contended that the world has come about not by way of any creation on the part of *Brahman*, but by the illusory appearance of *Brahman*. And in order to explain the appearance the exponents of Advaita Vedānta erect a principle incomprehensible in nature called *māyā*. As they say, *Brahman* through *māyā* appears as the universe, and the appearance is in the ultimate analysis illusory. Śankara (8th, 9th century A.D.) for his part makes a distinction between determinate and indeterminate *Brahman*. *Brahman* in its essential nature is pure being and through *māyā* appears as determinate, as God creating and sustaining the universe. But God being an effect of *māyā* falls short of *Brahman*, the ultimate reality. Generally speaking, this is the background against which Rāmānuja works out his view of the supreme Being. According to him, *Brahman*, far from being impersonal, is the divine Person in the sense that He is possessed of pure auspicious attributes and that He creates the universe and ordains everything therein.[44]

Rāmānuja (12th century A.D.) rejects the theory of two *Brahmans*,[45] holding that *Brahman* is essentially determinate and personal. *Brahman* is in fact a unity in difference and is differentiated into the "sentient" and "non-sentient". Indeed God is the sole reality and Creator of the world.

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[44] Dasgupta: *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. III, p. 296; also *Sribhāshya* tr. by G. Thibaut, p. 4.

[45] P. N. Srinivasachari: *Philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita*, pp. 61-65, Madras, 1943.

And the relation between Him and the world is very intimate. The world with its varied content is the body where *Brahman*, the divine Person, is the indwelling Self. The categories, mind and matter, cover the whole realm of empirical existence, and represent two of the infinite attributes which form the subtle body of the supreme Being. They are also conceived as determining Him. But *Brahman*, God, is immutable and is not transformed in any way. Transformation takes place only in His body.[46] Thus through His will out of the two attributes proceed the things and beings of the world as modes in which He manifests Himself. But the wealth of His being is not thereby exhausted.

Nimbārka (11th—12th century) argues that if God is the One and ultimate reality there is no point in saying that empirical things and beings represent some qualities of God. It is difficult to see, he tells us, how anything of this world could enter as a quality into the substance of God who is *ex hypothesi* the source of all that exists. In his view, *Brahman* is the Lord of the universe.[47] The world, including finite spirits, is created and sustained by the Lord. Some Upaniṣadic texts refer to Him by negations. This shows that *Brahman* is thus the supreme Being with pure non-empirical qualities. However, the things and beings that together constitute the world exist in God who being infinite and absolute pervades them all. So in their essence they derived from and are identical with God. But we cannot say that any thing or being is absolutely identical with Him.

Nimbārka steers clear between dualism and abstract monism, between the static and the dynamic view of Reality. He does not dismiss the cosmos as illusory, nor does he regard God and the world as real in the same sense. The world is indeed real. But its reality is dependent upon God who, though immutable and all-perfect, creates and sustains it. God is not, however, exhausted in His Creation.

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[46] Dasgupta: Vol. III, p. 156.
[47] *Op. cit.*, p. 430.

On the contrary, He remains in His being unchanged in bringing about the changeful world.

Madhva (13th century A.D.) joins other theistic thinkers in rejecting Śankara's doctrine of *māyā* and emphasizes that the word *"Brahman"* in the Upaniṣads and the *Brahma-Sūtra* means "the great Lord Viṣṇu".[48] Madhva is often called a dualist, but this is a misconception. Dualism is the theory that there are two fundamental realities independent of each other. It is far from true to say that Madhva posits two ultimate realities. He regards the world as real, not illusory, but he does not hold that it exists in its own rights. He is, on the contrary, at pains to show that there is a supreme Being at the back of the universe upon whom the multiplicity which is the world depends for its being and support. This supreme Being is the Creator and Lord of the universe. He is not One against the Many, but in the sense that He is the sole reality and self-existent.[49] As self-existent He is the other of the world. Again, as He is the Lord of the world, He possesses infinite qualities. He is all-perfect, omniscient and omnipotent. He has no wants, no desires to satisfy. Still He creates the world and creates it spontaneously as if He is in play. As we find, Nature is a network of laws. God is not, however, bound by laws, which proceed from Him and which He in His essence transcends. According to Madhva, things and beings are real because of the Lord upon whom they all rest. God being infinite is all-inclusive.

Vallabhācharyya (15th century A.D.), a contemporary of Sri Chaitanya of Bengal, emphasizes the immanent aspect of the Lord. He shares the view that the world is not an illusory superimposition upon *Brahman,* but that *Brahman* by His will manifests Himself in the things and beings of the world.[50] According to him, *Brahman* pervades the universe in His true nature, though in varying degrees as shown by the scale of empirical being. The Lord has for His attributes being, knowledge, and bliss. He is self-existent and eternally accomplished, omniscient and blissful. Out of the wealth of His being Creation proceeds by way of divine sport (*līlā*). One can only understand the world as God's *līlā* if one turns away from ego-centred life. We ordinarily think that the world is real on its own account, and run after vain earthly ends and transient sensuous desires. This is a life of ignorance, and one can only rise out of this state through the grace of God. And when grace descends, one attains right discrimination and right knowledge. Through the grace of the Lord one can even live in the knowledge that God is manifesting Himself in the universe. One then enters upon the highest phase of spiritual life in which union is enjoyed with the highest form of God in Heaven.[51]

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[48] Dasgupta: *History of Indian Philosophy,* Vol. IV, pp. 102-103, Cambridge, 1949.

[49] *Cf.* H. N. Raghavendrachar: *Madhva's Absolute, Philosophical Quarterly* (Amalner), October, 1943; also B. A. Krishnaswamy Rao: *Philosophy of Sri Madhvacharya,* Mysore, 1951.

[50] Dasgupta: Vol. IV, pp. 328-329.

Now let us consider the conception of God developed by the Bengal school of Vaiṣṇavism. This school centres round a spiritual colossus, Sri Chaitanya, who was indeed a God-man intoxicated with divine love. He often went into ecstatic trance and when seized with divine frenzy used to sing and dance.

It is a historical fact that by his life and teaching Sri Chaitanya caused a flood of spirituality, which for a time submerged the whole of Bengal and a major part of Northern and Southern India. He taught about divine love and devotion and impressed upon his followers that God was the divine Person. In his travels he encountered many orthodox Śankarites, some of whom he converted to his view of religion partly by argument and mostly by imparting to them spiritual illumination.

Such was Sri Chaitanya. But his religion was not altogether a new phenomenon. It had its roots in Bhāgavata religion which dates back to the remote past. Still a new life and force was infused into the age-old tradition by the spiritual experiences of Sri Chaitanya. Thus we see that the traditional conceptions embodied in Indian theistic literature came to be reconsidered and reoriented. And as a result of this a new theistic movement was on foot.

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[51] Parekh: pp. 246, 210-212.

The basic ideas of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism are described in the works of Sri Jiva Goswami and some other followers of Sri Chaitanya. Jiva, though not a contemporary of Sri Chaitanya, was an erudite Sanskrit scholar and an acute thinker. He absorbed the fundamentals of the religion preached by the Master and formulated them in clear terms in his famous *Six Essays*. Here I shall mainly consider the conception of God developed therein.

The major Indian systems, particularly the schools of Vedānta, accept the scriptures—the Veda and Upaniṣads—as infallible. Jiva Goswami first of all challenges this conception. The Veda and Upaniṣads are generally accepted as final because they embody the spiritual experiences of ancient sages and seers. But it is absurd, Goswami points out, to think that spiritual experience was a monopoly of past seers. There have since appeared through the centuries a good many mystics in India, and we shall have to reckon with the experiences revealed in their teachings. It is rather odd that some have made out of their obsession with the past a rigid unintelligent dogma. Rāmānuja in his Commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtra* quotes from the *Bhagavadgītā* and the Purāṇas. Advaitists, however, smile at him derisively. But they do not know that Rāmānuja is on good ground from which it is difficult to dislodge him. At all events, Jiva Goswami emphasizes that we should not stress the Upaniṣads as the Purāṇas abound in mystical tracts which are as authoritative as the Upaniṣads. He, therefore, concentrates on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* which he regards as authoritative as it is based on the mature spiritual experience of the author in samādhi or ecstatic trance.[52]

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[52] *Tattva-Sandarvah*, ed. by Krishna Chandra Goswami, p. 113, Calcutta.

According to Jiva Goswami, God is the sole reality, One without a second. But God in His essence is not indeterminate and impersonal. He is posited as the supreme Being who possesses some unique powers. The supreme Being is the divine Person who is all-perfect. He nevertheless creates the world which is real and is held in His being. Goswami distinguishes between two kinds of divine power, essential and unessential. The former pertains to God's nature, while the latter relates to the creation of the external world.[53] God is essentially the divine Person with a body of pure spiritual stuff, which represents His infinitely perfect attribute.

Goswami accepts the Bhāgavata doctrine that God is the supreme Person. But he goes a step further to interpret in his own way the text in which God is described as *Brahman, Paramātmā* and *Bhagavān*. He takes the term *"Brahman"* in the sense of pure indeterminate being which, he maintains, is only an aspect of the Divine, one attribute among His infinite attributes. God, according to him, is *Bhagavān*, the Lord of the universe, where He posits Himself as the innermost essence—*Paramātmā* of every being. So in Goswami's conception of Reality there is an advance upon the *Bhāgavata* where the term *"Brahman"* in reference to the Deity means the Infinite. With Jiva Goswami however the word signifies the indeterminate aspect of God.[54] In any case, according to him, God as the supreme Person is the central conception. If God through His power of *māyā* creates the world, He is superior to *māyā* and cannot be affected by it. It is also for this reason that God the Creator cannot derive from pure indeterminate *Brahman,* if any, in its association with anything like cosmic Ignorance.

Jiva Goswami then goes into detail about the power of the Lord, which he analyzes after the manner of the

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[53] *Op. cit.,* p. 123; S. K. Dey: *History of Early Vaiṣṇava Theology,* p. 210; also Dasgupta: Vol. IV, p. 409.

[54] *Tattva-Sandarvah,* p. 8; *Cf.* Sanatana Goswami: *Brihad-Bhāgavatāmritam,* II, ii, pp. 176-179, Dacca, 1952 B.S.

Viṣṇu Purāṇa. He points out that the essential power has three distinct aspects, being, consciousness and bliss. The first is the power that holds the individual souls and the material world; the second is that of divine knowledge or wisdom and is just omniscience; the third is the power of Delight. This last is the most important of the three as it indicates the highest aspect of God. The power of bliss implies that God is the boundless ocean of Delight out of which Creation as well as devotion in devotees proceeds. Devotion, in short, represents the reverse of the process of Creation, which is the overflowing of the Delight of the Divine, while devotion is the drawing-in of the outspread Delight to itself. This play of Delight is the play of the highest in God, which can be best conceived as love.[55]

In one of the previous chapters I have considered Tāntricism in some detail. Now, as regards Śaivism, there are two schools, Northern and Southern. Northern or Kashmir Śaivism is somewhat in the tradition of Advaita Vedānta, while the Southern school is in line with theism.[56]

Let us now glance at the controversy in the West over God and the Absolute. It is true that the problem of the personality of God in the West arises from the point of view of Christianity. The early Christians took for granted that God was the divine Person. For them the problem was rather whether He was one or three persons in the unity of His being. And the trouble arose mainly out of the doctrine of the Trinity, which in some way or other came to influence Christianity. Here it is not to my purpose to trace the history of the doctrine, interesting as it is. It is nevertheless relevant to consider the question of the personality of God as it came to figure in the disputes between theists and Absolutists. I cannot, however, go into detail about it. It would be sufficient for our purpose, I think, to consider some prominent representative views of God developed in the West in the recent past.

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[55] S. K. Dey: *History of Early Vaiṣṇava Theology*, p. 213.

[56] Radhakrishnan: *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, pp. 722-736. George Allen & Unwin, London, 1956; K. C. Pandey: *Bhaskari*, Vol. III, English translation, Lucknow, 1953; Dasgupta: *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. V, Cambridge, 1956.

Often enough the two concepts, individuality and personality, are sharply contrasted. According to some, the ultimate reality is an individual or the individual in the strict sense, but no person. According to others, the ultimate reality is God who is the divine Person. Bosanquet, for example, points out that things and beings, such as stone, tree, dog, mule, horse, man, etc. are ordinarily regarded as individual things and beings because they are distinct from, and seem to exist independently of, one another. They are individuals only in the sense of particulars. But strictly none of the empirical things and beings are independent as they do not contain in themselves the conditions of their existence. They only exist in relation to one another. And they in their mutual relationship point to an ultimate source, to Reality, which is self-dependent and all-inclusive. Now, if we posit Reality as the ground of the universe, Reality, being absolutely independent, is the true individual.[57] Individuality implies independence. However, a human being may be considered an individual in the relative sense because being rational he has some measure of self-determination.

Bosanquet, nevertheless, maintains that the Absolute is no person. According to him, personality is a legal or social category. A person, in his opinion, is so only in relation to others. Hence we cannot extend the term "personality" to any individual who is above or below social life. The Absolute is the sole reality; there is nothing beyond it with which it can be related. So the Absolute, being self-dependent and self-absorbed, cannot be conceived as a person. As Bosanquet puts it, "Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Lord, Omnipotent, Creator, Providence—none of these terms can apply to a universe or an Absolute which has nothing outside it."[58] On this point there is complete agreement between Bradley and Bosanquet. "I have not, I know," says Bradley, "to repeat to those who are acquainted with my book that for me the Absolute is not God. God for me has no meaning outside of the religious consciousness, and that essentially is practical. The Absolute for me cannot be God, because in the end the Absolute is related to nothing, and there cannot be a practical relation between it and the finite will."[59] The God of religion is the being who is worshipped and conceived as capable of reciprocating the devotee's feelings and prayers. But the Absolute is the whole. As soon as we begin to worship the Absolute, it appears an object before us and is thus transformed. In that case the Absolute falling short of the all-inclusive whole ceases to be the Absolute.

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[57] Bosanquet: *Individuality and Value*, p. 68, London, 1927; also Clement C. Webb: *God and Personality*, pp. 48-53, London, 1920.

Lotze, on the other hand, takes a somewhat different view. He ascribes personality to God, and his whole argument is based on an analysis of the nature of an empirical person. As he points out, each of us who are so many persons possesses an "inner core" of consciousness.[60] It is indeed true that in our daily life we enter into various relations with one another. But such intercourse presupposes an inner core that constitutes the essence of personality. Now, as the supreme Being is the sole reality, He is a person in the absolute sense. Finite persons, of course, have each some unique nature in virtue of which they are distinct from one another. Yet they are neither self-existent nor self-realized. The Supreme, on the contrary, being infinite, is self-poised and eternally accomplished. So the supreme Being is the supreme Person.

Clement C. Webb shows that there is hardly any difference between the position of Bosanquet and that of Lotze in so far as the question of personality is concerned.

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[58] Bosanquet: *The Value and Destiny of the Individual,* p. 249, London, 1913.

[59] *Essays on Truth and Reality,* p. 428, Oxford, 1914.

[60] Lotze: Philosophy of Religion, pp. 64-65, London, 1892, 1911.

By the word "personality" Lotze obviously means precisely what Bosanquet means by the word "individuality". If there is any difference between the two views, it is but verbal.[61]

All vague discussion on the problem of personality is useless. In order to settle whether God is a person we must have first of all a precise definition of the term. Webb profitably refers to the definition offered by Böethius, namely "the individual subsistence of a rational nature." This brings out two fundamental characteristics of a person, as an individual and as an individual with a rational nature. Now it ought to be clear that inanimate objects and lower animals are no persons because they, though individuals in a loose sense, lack rational nature. Here the phrase "rational nature" is taken to mean a nature which is capable of thought, judgment, reflection, will and choice. Some, of course, emphasize the intellectual, while others stress the practical, side of this nature. All this is a long story. Suffice it to say here that there is general agreement about the conception of person involved in the above definition. Our main concern, then, is to see whether God is a person in the real sense.

To begin with, we shall do well to give serious consideration to the idealist's objection. As we have seen above, it is contended that Reality as unconditioned and independent is the Absolute and that the latter is the all-inclusive whole. But the question is whether the Absolute is the limitless totality of things and beings. The concept "whole" as applied to the Absolute makes the latter a totality. In that case there is no distinction between Absolutism and Naturalism; "Nature" would then be a synonym for "the Absolute". Certainly neither Bradley nor Bosanquet advocates such a superficial view of Reality. They, on the contrary, point out that the Absolute is not a mere summation of phenomena. According to them, it is the whole in the sense of complete reality which manifests itself in the things and beings of the world. Now we ask: Are the manifestations real? Does the Absolute accept as a real predicate to itself every fact of the world? Absolutists answer this question in the negative adding only a word of caution.[62] They tell us that the phenomena which make up Nature are just appearances in which Reality appears. And these appearances are not illusory. Nevertheless, if these are to take their place in the Absolute as such they are to be transformed and transmuted.

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[61] Webb: *God and Personality*, pp. 48-59, London, 1920.

Be that as it may. The main question to settle is: Why does the Absolute appear? It is *ex hypothesi* eternally accomplished. It lacks nothing, neither does it think or feel or will. There is, then, nothing to link Reality with appearance. So the appearances about which Bradley speaks must be chimeras. But they are there; and we do not know exactly how they come about. Therefore, the whole difficulty involved in the Absolutist theory of Reality is concerned with the transition from the Absolute to the appearances.

We may be told that we are here raising a false issue; for Reality is never apart from its appearance. It is doubtless true to say so. But we have to grasp the rationale of the relation between Reality and appearance. We are afraid Absolutists have not much to say about it. They, as we see, proceed by analyzing the different aspects of empirical existence and in the end somehow rise to the conception of the Absolute as prior to everything. But they do not say why the Absolute appears.

As Bradley says, "Why there are appearances and why appearances of such various kinds, are questions not to be answered."[63] But why are these questions not to be answered? Because they cannot be. Bradley at any rate does not know the answer. Why, then, does he make a fuss about the Absolute? Anyway, the Absolute Bradley offers us is little more than a bare logical outline of what is there at the back of the universe. Such words as "whole", "self-consistent",

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[62] Bradley: *Appearance and Reality*, p. 455, Oxford, 1930.
[63] *Op. cit.*, p. 453.

"systematic", and so on, employed in reference to the Absolute, fail to convey a sense of its positive character. And in the end it remains indeterminate infinite being which we cannot comprehend and describe in any clear terms. It is bound to be so. If the Absolute is unconditioned, impersonal, it transcends everything—mind, speech, even the penetrating intellect of the Absolutists. All this shows that Absolutism is only an incomplete view of Reality and that much more is wanted to make it complete.

Going back in mind to the beginning of European philosophy, we find a thinker who seeks to penetrate through the veil of phenomena to an underlying ultimate fact. He is in quest of the ultimate source of the universe and declares water to be the reality of which everything else is a mode. The seeds of things and beings, he argues, contain moisture. Water is therefore the element common to them all, and he raises this common element to the status of the ultimate unity which transforms itself into multitudinous things and beings.

There are, to my mind, two distinct stages in the development of the thought of this early Greek philosopher. First he intuits that there is a fundamental unity behind the differences of things. Then he seeks to identify it with an element found to be common to all things and beings. Here we should keep two points clear before our mind—the initial sense of unity and its being determined as water. We must also note that whatever the unity in its essential nature may be, it cannot be an element common to some or all kinds of things. Clearly a common element only affords ground for similarity between the things in question, but does not make any essential unity of which the phenomena of Nature are manifestations. All this goes to show that though the unity which the philosopher senses may hold within it the multiplicity, the unity, so far as it is grasped by the philosopher, remains vague and indeterminate. The determination it receives later at his hands destroys it altogether.

Thus the unity lapses into one among countless other elements in Nature.

Strictly speaking, a bare sense of unity is not enough. Intuition of it is no doubt important, but the articulation of the unity is more so. A feeling of the One behind the Many is found at different stages of human evolution, but is not the exclusive privilege of civilization. Such a feeling we discern in the case of the religion of the Numinous and in other forms of primitive religion. Behind fetish worship there is a feeling that points, though vaguely, to a supernatural presence. And if primitives, unlike us moderns, pay their worshipful attention to stocks and stones, it is only because these in an inexpressible way speak to them the truth, appealing to their imagination through a subtle suggestion of the Supreme. The mind of the savage, like that of the philosopher, is presumably seized with the sense of a supreme presence. The only difference between them is that whereas the former loses its sense of unity in Nature in the gross symbolism to which it is driven partly under the urge of practical needs and partly by intellectual incapacity, the latter in virtue of its development through culture retains to a degree its theoretical interest and seeks to determine the felt unity by concept. The result, however, is much the same. The initial felt unity remains indeterminate despite the attempt made to determine it.

The point will be clearer if we consider a typical monistic theory from Spinoza whose speculation starts with an intuition of a unity which transcends all determination. According to him, there are some stages of knowledge, which form a hierarchy. Thus sensuous knowledge is the lowest stage in which objects are believed to be particulars without any intimate relations whatsoever. The next higher stage is scientific knowledge wherein systematic relations between things are discerned and formulated in the shape of general ideas and principles. And the third level of knowledge is that of philosophy at which the system of Nature reveals a fundamental unity lying in the heart of things and beings.

This revelation is but intellectual intuition which supervenes on the thinking consideration of things. We should note that a mere intuition of a vague unity in or behind Nature is not enough. If it is not explained away as purely subjective at least a part of its content must be communicable. The content of this intuition is admittedly the unity of the world.

Can we say that Spinoza grasps this in its true nature? That Spinoza does not quite comprehend the exact nature of the unity is shown by the fact that his conception of it is riddled with contradictions.[64] Thus the unity is conceived as Substance. But it is not shown clearly how the supreme Substance differentiates itself into the things and beings of the world. And, what is more, Spinoza squeezes into the essence of the Substance two among countless other attributes, namely thought and extension which can by no means be placed on the same footing. If there is anything material, it is, as we see, not for itself, it is not an end in itself, but is there for thought as its object and as an environment for all that is conscious and living. The physical and the finite do not contain within themselves their explanation, but every existence, whatever it is, is revealed through consciousness or thought which is self-revealing spiritual being. Thought in this large sense is obviously the prius of all existence. Such being the case, Spinoza's conception of the unity he intuits as Substance containing thought and extension among its infinite attributes is only a clumsy way of explaining the unity.

As we say, the essence of conscious being is consciousness or thought and the essence of a physical thing is extension. Now, if thought and extension be two attributes of the Substance, we cannot see how the Substance can be regarded as ultimate reality. It seems that Spinoza explains things and beings by reference to their respective essences which are after all two empirical elements. His Substance is, then, like a house where we store up things which we can retrieve whenever we want them back. Clearly, the content of the original intuition still remains indeterminate, and we can say that in trying to make it articulate Spinoza fumbles and in the end fails in his purpose. Is this, then, the fate of all philosophy?

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[64] *Vide* my article *Mysticism and Unity in Nature, Vedanta Kesari,* Vol. XXVII, March, 1941.

This brings us to a vast problem which I cannot possibly discuss here. To say the least about it, a philosophy does not necessarily begin with an initial intuition of a fundamental unity in the world; neither does it necessarily end in clumsy conceptions. A neat course of speculation is often, or can well be, attempted on the basis of the system of Nature. To begin with, we must consider what a system is like.

A system is a whole of mutually determined parts, each of which is a part only in the whole, occupying its place and performing its proper function. And it seems that the whole in its nature and existence is nothing but the individual parts put together. Now, if the system of Nature is a whole of reciprocally determined things and beings, we find the ultimate explanation of existence neither in the system as such nor in any of its parts. Therein every part presupposes all the others, and again the whole consists of the parts in their mutual relationship. So no one of the parts can explain itself. Again, we understand parts as distinct from one another, but not how they come into mutual relationship and constitute the whole. There is obviously need for going beyond to a principle which determines itself in the shape of the system of Nature without itself being determined by anything. This principle, in short, must be self-determined, or else, as soon as we conceive it as determined by something outside it an infinite regress would be under way. So the principle that would explain Nature with her wealth of details must be self-existent, or which is the same thing, absolutely free.

There is an analogue, though rather a remote one, between the self-determination of which we speak here and finite spirits. On a reflective analysis of our inner being the conception of self-conscious and self-determined being comes to our mind. But the difficulty is that though the idea of spirit has for its basis the experience of our inner being it cannot be completely filled in by actual existence. Unlike stocks and stones and the lower animals, finite spirits enjoy a measure of self-determination. It is none the less true that they are to a great extent determined by their environments including their bodies and also by their mental being. We thus come to a pretty pass. Though we have the conception of spirit as free, yet we cannot fill it with any concrete content from actual experience. This is unsatisfactory. Intellectual analysis and comprehension can lead us far towards the supreme Being, if there be any. But this is not enough. So a new approach is necessary. It is now clear that Absolutists like Bradley and Bosanquet walk in half-light. They fail of necessity to comprehend fully the nature of Reality by way of mere speculation.

They may, nevertheless, retort that their position in regard to the problem of the personality of God is amply confirmed by a consideration of religious consciousness. They seek to show that the God of religious consciousness stultifies Himself. Here Bradley has recourse to subtle dialectic. As he puts it, "God must be at once the complete satisfaction of all finite aspiration, and yet on the other side must stand in relation with my will. Religion (at least in my view) is practical, and on the other hand in the highest religion its object is supreme goodness and power. We have a perfect real will, and we have my will, and the practical relation of these wills is what we mean by religion. And yet, if perfection is actually realized, what becomes of my will which is over against the complete Good Will? While, on the other hand, if there is no such Will, what becomes of God?"[65]

Bradley puts his finger on the crux of the whole matter when he contends that it is difficult to posit God as all-perfect against finite wills. But the difficulty is not new to us. We have already considered it in the course of our analysis of Bradley's conception of Reality and appearance. It cannot be resolved unless the whole fact of Creation is cleared up. Bradley suggests that the perfect Will is perfection provided that it is actually realized. Now, if God is all-perfect, He is in Himself, and cannot be in relation with any finite will. There is, then, no religion; for religion involves a relation between one all-perfect supreme Being and finite spirits.

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[65] *Essays on Truth and Reality*, pp. 428-429.

This is a problem for us to solve and I shall return to it later. Bradley however despairs of any solution, though he does suggest a remedy. He tells us that God in order to save Himself from contradiction, the *bête noire* to the logician, must forgo His perfection. Thus "He will be reduced to a person who does the best in him with limited knowledge and power." God would be limited; yet He would remain "sufficiently superior to ourselves to be worshipped." If so, this is an entirely new conception of religion. The object of religion now becomes the seat of superiority over us in the degree of goodness, knowledge and power. But we do not see how we are better off with a limited God.

Bradley himself cannot deny that there are around us in Nature as well as in society many who are superior to us. But he does not show why people in their religious aspiration become unmindful of them and seek after a being who is not only superior to them, but all-perfect. He is in good company. There are many thinkers besides him who are driven to the conception of a finite God. They are apparently obsessed with the problem of evil. If evil is real, they contend, God cannot be all-good; or, if He is all-good, He is not omnipotent; for He cannot control evil. In one case God is imperfect, and in the other He is finite, which means that God is a limited being. As Bosanquet says, "The practical attitude means that the contradiction between good and evil survives and the survival of this contradiction necessarily implies that God as worshipped in religion is not a being for whom evil is annihilated."[66]

Meliorists, again, conceive God only as a co-worker of men. We are told that we need the help of God in our endeavour to better the world order and that religion is merely an attitude towards such a fellow worker.[67] Needless to say, there are so many to co-operate with on earth, such as scientists, nuclear physicists especially, politicians, soldiers, and so forth. Why should we then seek out someone like God whom we do not see or touch? There is no denying that evil presents one of the major metaphysical conundrums that link up with the problem of Creation. As Creation is an ultimate fact, the problems of Creation and evil defy metaphysical solution. But metaphysicians will not recognize this. Some of them, on the contrary, are so egoistic that they arrogate to themselves all wisdom. It is absurd that they sit in judgment upon God Himself, who is the ultimate reality, instead of confessing their ignorance and failure. Anyway, the theory of a finite God leads nowhere and makes a mess of religion and religious life.

We now come to a question which merits our serious consideration. It is whether religion is possible without God. If God as the all-perfect Being does not exist, should we say in Bosanquet's words that religious consciousness is nothing more than "dramatization of man's will for perfection"? We know of some paths that are calculated to lead to perfection. These are broadly the paths to *Nirvāṇa,* a state in which empirical consciousness ceases altogether. *Nirvāṇa,* however, may not be a state of overall negation. It may, on the contrary, be all positive. It is nevertheless a transcendent state. It is well known that in some quarters elaborate techniques called systems of yoga were in the past developed for the purpose of attaining to the state of perfection. They are followed even to this day.

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[66] *The Value and Destiny of the Individual,* pp. 249-250.

[67] W. James: *Pragmatism,* chap. VIII; *Some Problems of Philosophy,* p. 228; *The Will to Believe,* p. 141; New York, 1916, 1916, 1904.

The Advaitist, for example, fixes upon the scriptural texts that deal with the Absolute, apprehends their meaning and then through reasoning and finally through contemplation transcends his empirical being and merges into indeterminate being which is pure and perfect. The Buddhist method of realization, on the other hand, was designed to attain to the state in which all desires and individuality, the root cause of sorrow and suffering, cease. And to this end certain definite rules of discipline and conduct were framed for the aspirant to follow. In so far as the final achievement was concerned, the aspirant had to depend upon himself except for the guidance from the teaching of the Buddha. Buddhism in this sense was no religion any more than were the various systems of yoga, and so on. It is, of course, true that later Buddhism took on an air of religion when the Buddha himself was posited as the object of worship. Still he was never worshipped as God, but only as the enlightened one. *Nirvāṇa*, not the Buddha, was the end of yoga.

In any case, it cannot be gainsaid that even before the advent of Buddhism and Jainism subtle systems of yoga were developed and practised by those who wanted to pass beyond the phenomenal world into a state of pure consciousness untrammelled by the forces of Nature. The Pātañjala Yoga System embodies a detailed account of some such practices and the experiences corresponding to them.[68] The Buddha was a great yogi, and all that he did was to simplify the yogic system prevailing in his time and adapt for the common people to follow even in their ordinary life. Now what is said of Buddhism is true of Jainism as well since God has no place in either. In both a state of being absolutely free from the influence of empirical existence was held out as the ideal for every individual to reach. And every individual was to achieve it by his own efforts in purifying his being of the material accretions that covered it.

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[68] Patañjali only systematized the yoga or yogas which prevailed long before him.

It may now be pointed out that in the Pātañjala System there is mention of God and that I am unwarrantably driving a wedge between religion and yoga. It is true that a developed religion includes in its practical discipline a yoga in its narrow sense. Generally speaking, yoga is the technique which helps to control the body and mind and leads at the ultimate stage of the spiritual discipline to the transcending or transformation of one's empirical being. Yoga in the narrow sense, however, is just the means or way of concentrating upon the object of devotion. Bhakti or love of God is a yoga in this sense. When we love God above all things we lose ourselves in the thought of God. But we cannot say that yoga as a mere means of controlling our lower nature is religion, although love of God is a kind of yoga. Love of God is so in the sense that through it the being of an individual is directed towards God and is finally concentrated upon Him. Religion is essentially linked to God; it stands and falls with Him. So religion as such has to be clearly distinguished from any kind of yoga in the general sense.

The reference to God in Pātañjala Yoga is an enigma to us. Patañjali accepts in toto Sānkhya metaphysics in which God in the sense of ultimate reality has no place. Even if we waive this point, the fact remains that in both these systems the ultimate end of the individual self is to transcend his empirical consciousness and experience and to realize his true nature which is pure consciousness. One of the aphorisms of Patañjali states that the contemplation of God speeds up the spiritual development of the aspirant and brings about the ultimate state of poise far quicker than otherwise.[69] Patañjali however conceives God not as the sole reality, but as one self among countless other selves which are real and independent of one another and of Prakriti,[70] although he regards God as eternally free, all-perfect, all-wise and the teacher of the most ancient sages.[71]

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[69] *Yoga-Sūtra*, I, 23; II, 45.
[70] The principle of matter.

According to both Sānkhya and Yoga, an infinite number of spirits and Prakriti—the principle of matter or primitive matter are ultimate realities, and spirits in relation to primitive matter become the invisible ground of the world in its evolution out of the primal stuff. Obviously God is smuggled into the Pātañjala System, but from where we do not know.[72] As God is conceived merely as a means in this system and as union with Him as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe is not the aim of this yoga, we cannot read any religion in the strict sense into the Pātañjala System.

There is an affinity between the Yoga and the Nyāya conception of God. The Naiyāyika, like Patañjali, posits a supreme Being called God. But, according to the former, God, though infinite, all-wise and the moral Governor, is not the sole reality; He is only one among many selves, though He is the supreme Self. Besides God there are lesser souls and also a multitude of atoms. Thus God is no Creator in the absolute sense; He only starts the process of Creation which proceeds by way of permutations and combinations of atoms and contacts between evolutes and souls. Further, according to Nyāya, a soul in its true nature is a pure substance void of all empirical attributes. So in the ultimate state of emancipation a soul eliminates from itself even consciousness along with other attributes, which are mere accretions to it. To realize oneself as pure substance is, then, the ultimate end for one to achieve, and for this philosophical analysis is all that is needed. In the Nyāya conception of liberation therefore God has no relevance as He is not conceived as the sole reality, far less as the end of human life, although the aspirant may seek the grace of God as an aid to the realization of the ultimate nature of his self.

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[71] *Op. cit.*, I, 24-26.

[72] According to some, the conception of God found in the Yoga-System is found also in Sānkhya. *Vide* Hariharananda: *Pātañjala Yoga Darshana*, pp. 440-444, Calcutta, 1938.

Now to come back to our point which is whether the God of religion is to be distinguished from the Absolute. It goes without saying that the Absolute is the ultimate reality. But what about God? However much the conception of God may vary from religion to religion, it can be said without fear of contradiction that God in religion is the Being infinite and eternal, who creates, controls and sustains the universe. And God so conceived must be identical with the Absolute, the ultimate reality. But the difficulty is that the Absolute is limitless and so cannot be related to anything, while God being the avowed object of religion stands in a significant relation to the devotee.

Here a problem presents itself to us and in fact baffles us, but if our religious aspiration be no illusion, it must be solved. God in His relation to the devotee appears to be a person. But, as Bradley points out, "a personal God is not the ultimate truth about the universe." On the other hand, without a personal God religion is myth. Religion is, then, a riddle. Bradley admits this when he says, "And exactly how religious truths are to be in the end supplemented and corrected, I would repeat that, as I understand the matter, metaphysics cannot say. Within the outline which it takes as real there is room for all truth, and all truth assuredly is completed. But the answer in concrete detail is beyond the finite intellect, and is even beyond any mere understanding."[73]

We can indeed only solve the problem of God and the Absolute in the light of deepest spiritual experience. It is no exaggeration to say that in modern times we find such experience in Ramakrishna. He told his devotees that God as a person is known only in spiritual realization. Through His grace the devotee can attain union with Him and enjoy Him in His spiritual being. The devotee then sees clearly that it is God who has made this world and ordains everything. The aspirant then realizes a spiritual form or forms of God and communes with Him.

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[73] *Essays on Truth and Reality*, p. 433.

The spiritual forms in which God appears to His devotees are no phantoms. As we have already seen, they are infinitely more real than anything of this world. But, as Ramakrishna pointed out, God is the divine Person not only in this sense, but in that He is the Creator and Ordainer of the universe. Though God is not like an empirical being, and though all-perfect and eternally accomplished, He creates the gross and subtle worlds. Though He has no mind or will as we have and no gross body, hands or feet, yet He eternally determines everything in the universe. And since He transcends personality as we ordinarily conceive it to be, He is the Superperson in the sense that He acts as if He is like us, but in reality He surpasses us and everything. God as such is capable of grace and presents Himself to His devotees in various forms of pure spiritual stuff. Infinite as He is, He assumes even human form through birth to give satisfaction to His devotees on the earthly plane and guidance to civilization and culture. There is here no why or how. That is His way. And this the devotee realizes only at a developed stage of spiritual life.

Ramakrishna however did not stop with this account. He went on to say that God has an indeterminate aspect as well, in which all determinations and relations are annulled. This aspect is what is often called the Absolute. It seems that there is an ambiguity about the word "the Absolute" which is generally taken to mean the ultimate reality. Then God, conceived as Reality, must be identical with the Absolute. But the difficulty is that God as Creator and Ordainer is determinate in a sense, while the Absolute is wholly indeterminate. These two conflicting conceptions are, however, synthesized by Ramakrishna's experiences. As he pointed out, when the aspirant goes into the supreme state of trance where his individuality melts away altogether, he reaches the Absolute in the sense of the Indeterminate. But it often so happens that he returns from that state to the consciousness of the empirical world. We have to understand how the aspirant reaches the Indeterminate and comes out of it back to the world. If God is the Ordainer of everything, the devotee does so only through His grace, no matter if he remains ignorant of it all. If he comes out of the state of indeterminate existence, he does so only through the will of God.

Ramakrishna averred that God as Creator and Ordainer is the pivot on which the whole universe turns. If God Himself guides the aspirant to the realization of the Indeterminate, God must be much more than the Indeterminate. That is to say, God being the supreme Reality beyond which nothing falls, the Absolute in the sense of the Indeterminate must be only an aspect or moment in the being of God. Ramakrishna stated that God presents Himself to the aspirant in these two ways, as determinate and indeterminate. And these two fundamental forms exhaust the possibility of the human realization of God. But it does not mean that any revelation does or can exhaust the nature of God, though, of course, we can know as much of God as is revealed by Him. No one can claim that he has known Him as He is in His complete nature. As Ramakrishna said, God reveals Himself with form and without form as well and as such is the supreme Person. Obviously God as the supreme Person, or which is the same thing, as the Superperson is the centre of the universe.

In the brief survey attempted above of the Eastern and Western views we have seen that some take Reality as personal, while others regard it as impersonal. Absolutists make the Absolute supreme and allow only a lower status to God the Personal. Indeed in the *Bhagavadgītā* an attempt is made to reconcile the Personal and the Impersonal by the conception of the supreme Person—Puruṣottama, but it is not complete. Ramakrishna further clarified the idea of the divine Person by effecting a synthesis of the Personal and the Impersonal. As he showed, God, revealing Himself in the twofold way mentioned above transcends the determinate and the indeterminate, the personal and the impersonal, and what God in Himself is as apart from these two kinds of revelation nobody can tell. That is the ultimate mystery which no mystic can penetrate.

It is no use arguing that God as the Creator of evil must be imperfect. Ramakrishna in fact did not deny that evil is present in the world. He, however, pointed out that it is a necessary element in the scheme of Creation and must be overcome in the end. It is there only as the means of catharsis or the purging of our being. Good presupposes evil as much as light posits darkness. So we can achieve the former only as victory over the latter. But it does not mean that God is confronted with evil, or that He has to contend with it. In the nature and on the side of God there is no question of good against evil. God is eternally accomplished ; He is eternal being and eternal bliss. The struggle between good and evil goes on only in the empirical realm. When the aspirant attains union with God, he does so as the triumph of good over evil and in that blessed state he transcends both.

It may now be asked: If God is all-perfect why does He not create a better world? If He does not it shows that He is limited in power, even if it is admitted that He is all-perfect. Here the sceptic goes too far. As Ramakrishna said, how foolish it is to sit in judgment upon God who creates and sustains the universe. We cannot possibly find fault with Him. God could say unto the sceptic as He said unto Job, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?"[74] Inscrutable are His ways, and we must surrender to His will and seek refuge in Him. Ramakrishna compared the world to a hospital where patients underwent operations and treatment in order to be healed of their ailments. We in our worldly life suffer, and our sufferings wash away the filth from our bodies and minds and make us fit for higher life. God is so merciful that He is ever drawing us towards Him by a twofold means—by the evil we suffer as well as by the yearning we have for good company, dispassion, knowledge and love which He out of infinite grace implanted in us.

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[74] O. T., *The Book of Job,* xxxviii, 4.

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